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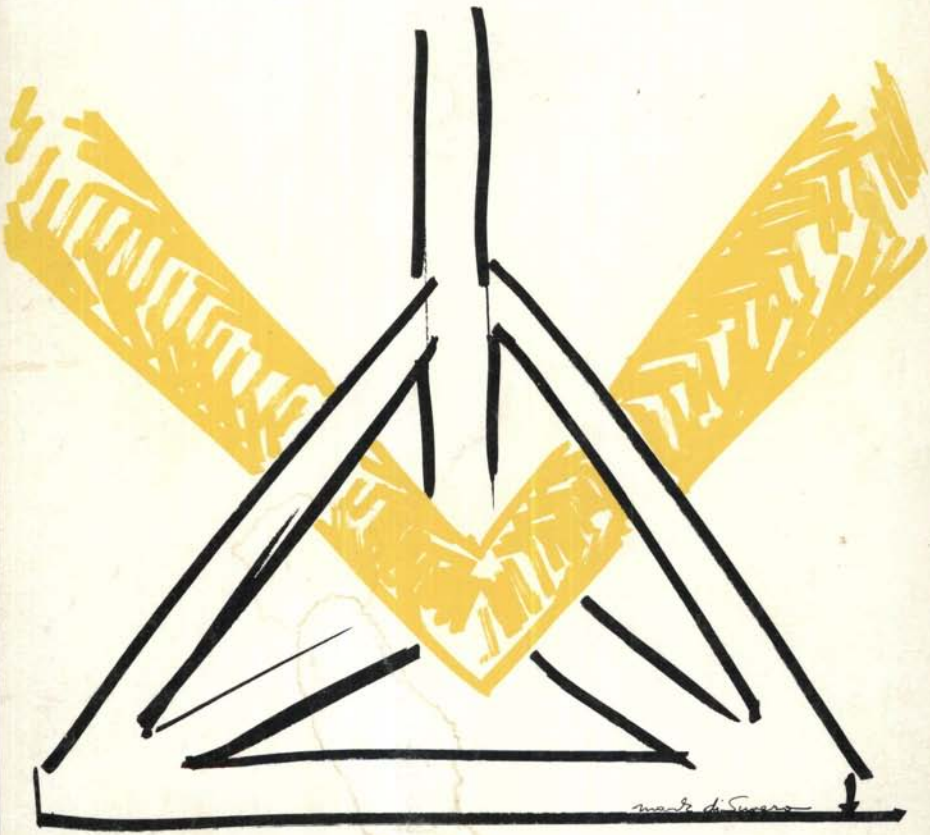

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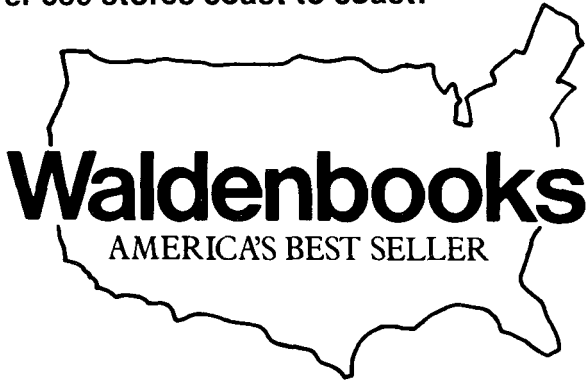

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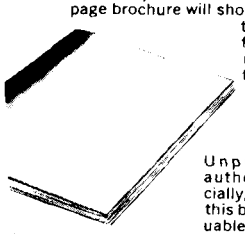

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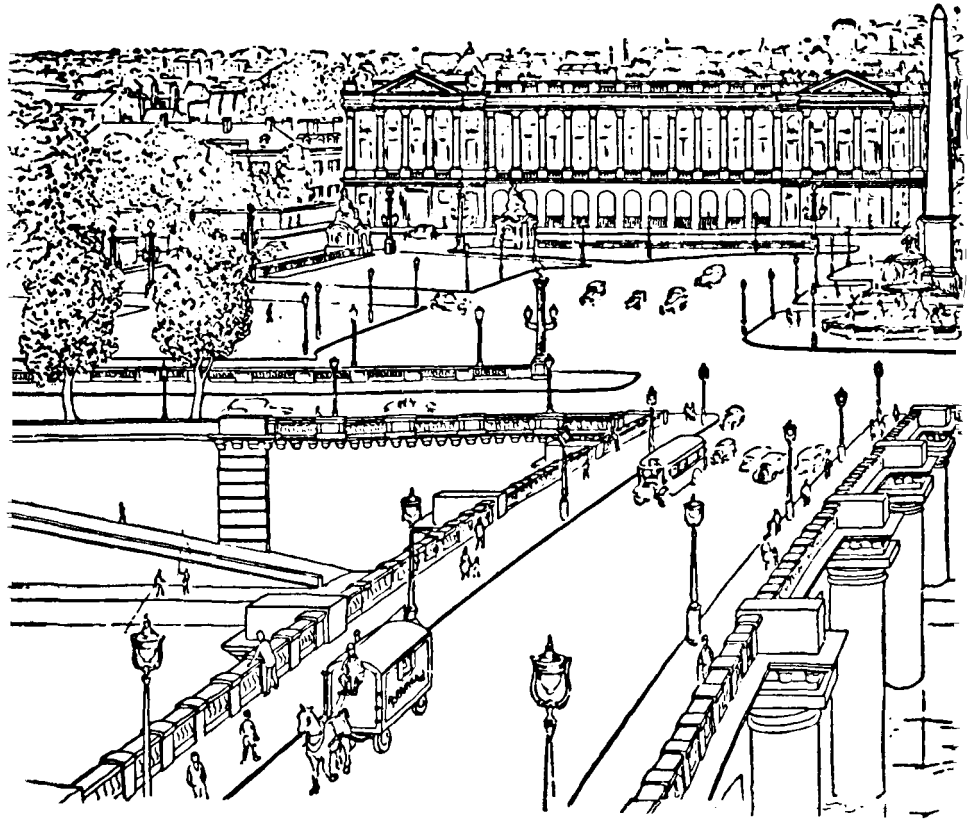

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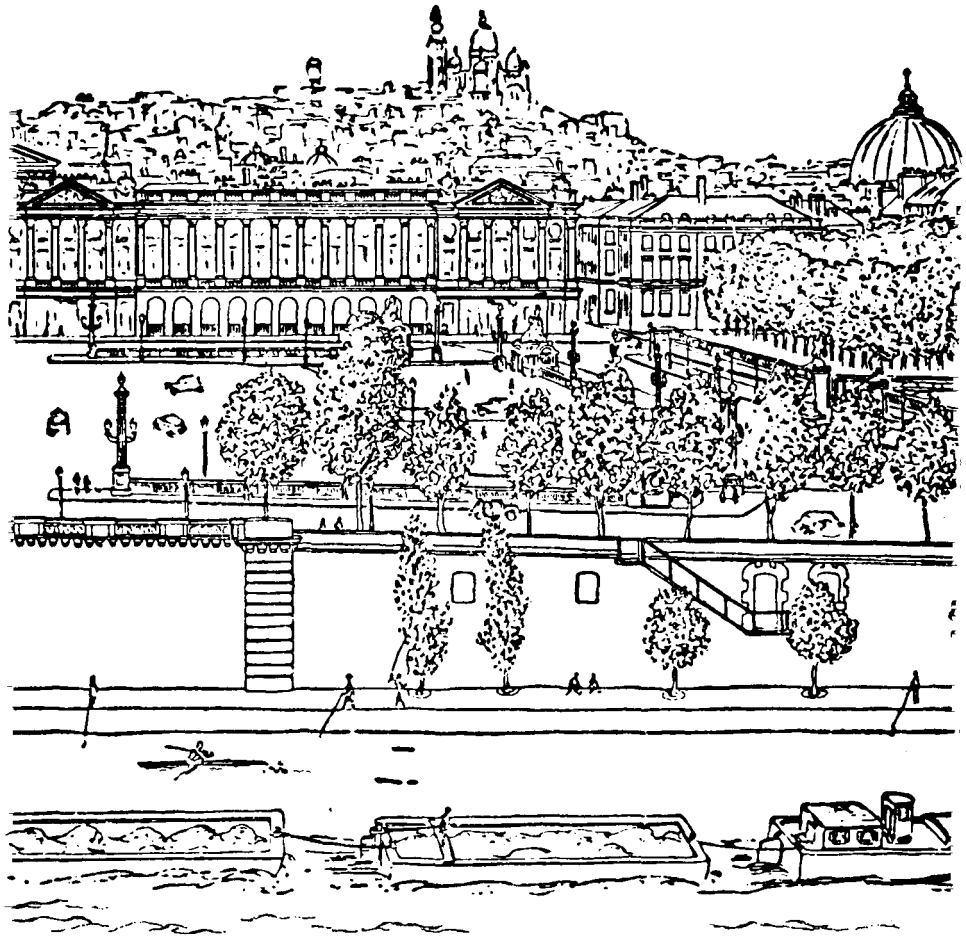

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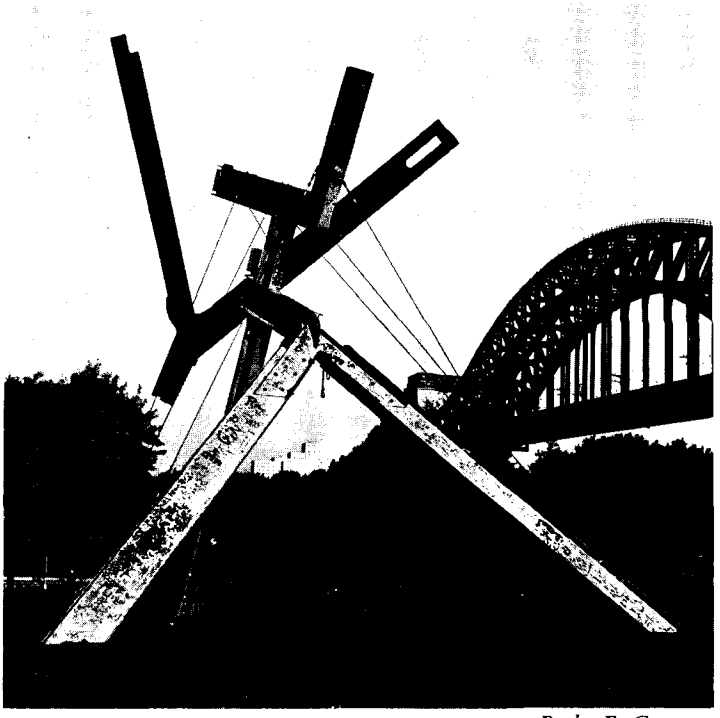

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NOTICE

It would be absurd to suggest that this magazine can survive without financial help from the outside. Indeed, much of its energies have been taken up with devising methods of survival—organizing its occasional Revels to raise money, its poster programs, its publishing company (Paris Review Editions), *the collation of its craft-of-writing series in book form* (Writers at Work)—*all of this to find funds to keep the magazine going.*

Though such programs have been reasonably successful, the financial situation remains shaky. The magazine publishes too many pages for its own good; it pays its contributors more than it can properly afford; it refuses to peg its prices at a sufficient altitude; it doesn't have an affiliation with a helpful university or foundation; often it makes very little compromise with good taste (one of the editor-in-chief's aunts boiled #58 in a pot on the stove for something in it which disturbed her sensibilities).

But in other matters the magazine scrimps as best it can: none of the editors receive anything but the barest of compensations for what they do; the circulation editor out in the mysterious warrens of Flushing, N.Y. is the only one paid a salary for her ministrations. Truly, it would be difficult to accuse the magazine of financial profligacy in a bad sense.

Yet, the magazine needs help. It does not wish to say so. Nothing like this notice has appeared in these pages since the magazine was founded in 1953. The paper has been able to keep its house reasonably in order with the help of friends and associates. But it has never had a true patron. One thinks of the ideal relationship worked out between Tschaikovsky and Nadejda von Meck, the composer's patroness from 1877-1890—their arrangement that despite her considerable financial help there would be no personal relationship between the two: if they happened to meet at concerts it was said that they never talked; he acknowledged her presence with a bow. The dedication of an occasional symphony was sufficient.

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This magazine is not in that enviable position. Thus, this notice is being published to ask readers, admirers, contributors, (even aggrieved aunts) to consider coming to the aid of this paper. It deserves to be helped. For over twenty years it has survived in a field which receives little public attention (or support) and yet which provides the opportunity to nurture this country's writers (especially those starting off) by printing what they wish to try. The magazine to date has published 153 fiction writers, 302 poets, many for the first time—an awesome number for a magazine in an endeavor where journals often die after two or three numbers. . .the lifespan of butterflies.

There is not much this paper can give in return to a substantial contributor—some Paris Review *handbills, a lifetime subscription, back issues (some of the earlier* Reviews *are collector's items), an opportunity to be listed as a Patron in the pages of a subsequent issue if the donor wishes so. Perhaps the most realistic compensation is that a donor will realize that his or her help will assist what may seem a very small publishing venture to some but which for many people, especially writers, is a very considerable one.*

—G.A.P.

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The Joycelin Shrager Story

Thomas M. Disch

When people asked what he did, Donald Long's standard riposte was, "I'm a mechanic of the dream." Meaning, he was a projectionist. Actually few people had to ask, since Donald had been around since the first black-and-white flickerings of the Movement early in the fifties. With the money he earned at the Europa he produced *Footage*, first as a quarterly and then bi-monthly. For years it was their only magazine, but gradually as success changed the Movement into the Underground, *Footage* was supplemented and then supplanted by newer, more commercially oriented magazines. Donald Long's reputation as the Rhadamanthys of the underground film was undiminished, and possibly enhanced, by reason of this failure, but there was one consequence to be regretted—he had to continue full-time at the Europa, from one in the afternoon till the early evening, six days a week.

The Europa is on 8th Avenue, just below 49th. Originally it had been a showcase for Russian, Polish, and Estonian movies not otherwise distributed in the city, but then, imperceptibly,

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without a change of owner (or, so far as Donald could see, of clientele), the Europa drifted toward a policy of nudism and the exposure of organized vice, especially the white slavery traffic. By the end of '69 the Sexual Revolution had swept the October Revolution into oblivion.

Something of the same thing had been happening in his own life. Donald was forty-two, and after decades of honest homeliness he was finally coming into his own. What had been even ten years ago a boney kind of face was now rather striking in a severe way. No longer did he dissemble his baldness with a few iron-gray strands brushed up from the sides. No, he let it declare itself, and what hair still was left to him he grew, boldly, down to his shoulders. But best of all, his somatotype had become trendy, and he was able to fit into all the skimpy pullovers and striped pants that most men couldn't have attempted after the age of thirty.

Not that he became a satyr quite. He simply began taking advantage of the opportunities that had always offered themselves to him from time to time. At parties he was less diffident. He would even dance. (He had gone to a Reichian therapist and redirected some of his energies from his head down to his balls and, concomitantly, his feet.) He got rolfed, and laid.

But he didn't fall in love. He kept waiting, alert as a seismograph, for some tremor of affection, warmth, whatever. All he ever felt was a great glow of health and, toward his partners, benevolence, a degree of gratitude, a lesser degree of curiosity. But love? Never.

He knew what love was. Twice before he'd been in love. The first time, at twenty-four, he'd made the mistake of marrying his love-object, the black actress Cerise Miles. That was 1949, the year of Kazan's *Pinky*, and among enlightened Manhattanites love conquered all. By 1951 Donald and Cerise had come to hate each other much more passionately than they'd ever loved. As a result, his memories of the early, positive period of the relationship resembled, in its deliberate fuzziness, the one film Donald had ever made himself, *Tides of the*

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Blood. Among much else, *Tides* was a record of his marriage's collapse. (And, by implication, of Western Civilization's.) Cerise had played herself, improvisationally, a performance that even after Donald's editing was considered a limit-case of what underground cinema could do along the lines of honesty.

The second time he was luckier and fell in love with the wife of his best friend, Gary Webb. The necessity of concealment kept Donald and Grace Webb in a state of zesty suspense and made their few rare moments alone together lyrical in the extreme. Then, after the adultery had gone on some two years, Grace felt she had to tell Gary. There was no question of divorce, since both Webbs were renegade Catholics who still believed in the sanctity of the marriage bond and the natural law. It was just her unconquerable candor. Gary was wretched and furious by turns, and Donald and Grace were rapturously guilty and more in love than ever.

Gary Webb was at that time (the late fifties) the most prolific (and, according to *Footage*, the best) director in the Movement. Film for him was less an art than a religion. He was its priest, and his camera was the sacrament he carried through the world, hallowing it. He filmed everything: snowfalls, muggings, Grace in *hal asana* position, trees in Washington Square, football games on Channel 5, a friend's stoned, staring iris (a shot he was sure Hitchcock had plagiarized in *Psycho*), a dripping faucet, cars on the street, and the natural births of all six of his sons. He also filmed, with Grace's connivance, representative moments of her adultery, and this footage became the basis of his most revolutionary and well-known film, *Reel 16* (1959).

The affair ended when Gary inherited his grandfather's farm in western Kansas. The Webbs moved west, with their cats and children and cameras, and in a few months Grace had been absorbed into the irrecoverable past. Years later he was to get a postcard from either Grace or Gary, he could never be sure, to which was glued a snippet from the ad for *The Great Gatsby*: "Gone is the romance that was so divine." The card showed a motel outside of Lebanon, Kansas.

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On Sunday mornings, thanks to its owner, Norman Brodkey, and to the tax laws that make such transformations so profitable, the Europa became the Foundation for Free Cinema. The Foundation's screening policy was egalitarian, even kindly in a careless way, mixing established old masters like Anger and Brakhage with whatever else happened along, and throwing in an occasional reel of the Europa's indigenous beavers when their directors or actors had credentials in the Movement. This policy usually guaranteed a minimum attendance figure of twenty-five or thirty, comprised mainly of fledgling filmmakers, their casts and close friends.

On this particular Sunday, May 17, 1970, the Foundation was showing two works by Anna Congdon: *Stigma* (1954, 48 min.) and *Dreams of Eurydice* (1967, 73 min.). Because these combined running times precluded more than a token representation of films by the Foundation's regular customers, because Miss Congdon had never ventured from her native Australia and so lacked the social leverage by which to muster the fiction of a coterie, and finally, because the weather was more than ordinarily unacceptable, the turnout stopped just one short of none at all. That one was Mike Georgiadis, whose oeuvre, long since completed, shared a common mythopoeic strain with Miss Congdon's, and at whose urgings Donald had at last agreed to give the old girl her crack at America.

Mike was propped on the stainless steel ledge of the ticket booth, coughing, joking, and smoking fifteen cent El Productos. It was an evil, evocative cough, but pardonable when you knew that Mike was dying of emphysema, had been dying of emphysema now for all of fourteen years.

They passed the rainy minutes gossiping about colleagues, the waxing and waning of their incomes, marriages, entanglements, and reputations. Mike, who was firmly established at the waning end of all scales, had a knack for interpreting any scrap of news so as to make his friends seem morons, martyrs, or, if the news were incontestably good, thieves. Donald, whose style was to be magnanimous, praised whom he could and forgave the rest. Donald's exculpations incited Mike to

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ever fiercer judgments, and these in turn provoked Donald to still more ingenious charities. They worked well together.

A damp, large, lardy girl in a yellow vinyl poncho with a Bolex Rex-4 pendant from her neck like some mammoth ankh had parked herself before the Foundation's mimeoed schedule, which was scotch-taped over the glassed display of stills for *Lust Party*. As she read her mouth and eyebrows ticked an unceasing commentary of pouts, sneers, frowns, and grave suspicions. 'Disturbed' was the word that came to mind.

Mike vanished into the theater.

Donald couldn't take his eyes off the girl's Bolex. Its fittings were rusty, the leather was peeling from its sides, and its carrying strap was a doubled length of twine: a camera as woebegone as the wide, wet, hungry eyes of a Keane puppy. He was smitten.

She looked at him and looked away. She scrabbled in a tie-dyed cotton satchel and brought out a dollar bill compactly folded into sixteenths. She undid the dollar regretfully and pushed it into Donald's cage.

"Has it started yet?" she asked.

"No, not yet. We've been waiting for more people to turn up."

"Then maybe you could do me a favor?" She bared her small brown teeth in a defeated smile, like a teenage panhandler's or a Scientologist's, that no rebuff could dismay.

"Certainly," said Donald.

"I'm making a film." When he did not contradict her she went on. "And I need some footage of me coming down the street to the theater here. All you have to do is aim the camera at me and look through here." She pointed to the viewfinder, from which the eyeguard was missing. "And touch this when I say to. Otherwise it's all wound up and ready to shoot."

Donald consented to be her assistant. He came out from the ticket window and took the wounded camera in his arms.

"Be careful with it," she thought to insist, seeing that he was careful. "These things are very expensive."

Then she walked up to the corner, turned around, fussed

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with her poncho, squared her shoulders, and fixed her wide, meaty lips in a smile representing an irrepressible buoyancy.

"Now!" she shouted.

Through the viewfinder he watched her advancing toward him with a sinking certainty that Fate had come in at the door without knocking. He knew she was not beautiful. Indeed, her face and figure and bearing passed beyond mere homeliness into the realm of absolutes. She was sinfully ugly. Nevertheless his whole frame was in a tremble of sexual anxiety such as no beaver had ever roused him to.

When the film had run out, she said, "You're Donald Long, aren't you?"

He admitted he was.

"Wow, that's terrific. You know, I've read every word you've ever written?"

"No kidding."

"Yeah." She nodded her head solemnly. "So this is really an important moment in my life." Then, offering her hand: "I'm Joycelin Shrager."

Joycelin's film, *The Dance of Life* (or rather, this latest installment, for *The Dance of Life* was conceived as a *film fleuve*, ever flowing on, the unexpurgated and amazing story of her life) was screened by the Foundation for Free Cinema three Sundays later. There was a good turnout. One reason was because this was an open screening, and where there is hope there is good attendance. The other reason was because Donald had been sending out signals and his friends had rallied round, as to Roncesvalles. Jesse Aarons, a director who was making a name in porn, had come, and Ed Gardner, who reviewed sometimes for *The Voice*; Louise Hiller, the modern dancer who had rolfed Donald, and her latest boyfriend, Muhammed Kenzo, a black painter who'd had a painting in the Whitney; the Bachofens, of the Bachofen Gallery, and their son Arnold; Mike Georgiadis, Helen Emerson, and Rafe Kramer (survivors from the older, Maya Deren era of the Art Film); Lloyd Watts, the conceptual artist who'd come to doing

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street signs and traffic lights by way of his underground movies about cars, and three poets from St. Mark's, one of whom had had the bad fortune to be wearing the same lime-green leather pants as Jesse Aarons. In all, an imposing assembly.

Joycelin's three best friends were also at hand, eager to see themselves as stars on the Europa's screen. There was Murray, a tall, lean, aging, gay Satanist with frizzed hair; his roommate Eric, an office temporary; and Doris Del Ray (her stage name) who'd met Joycelin at a New School film history course in 1968. Doris now studied Jazz Ballet with a teacher in Brooklyn Heights who had studied at Jacob's Pillow, long ago, with Ruth St. Denis. Consequently there was always a special sequence featuring Doris Del Ray, with choreography by Doris Del Ray, in each new installment of the Work-in-Progress. There she would be in her black tights, clawing at the air, or convulsed into an expressive ball of pain, or solemnly mounting and descending staircases swathed in remnants of sheer rayon, her long hair unbound, a priestess. This time it was a kind of temple scene, with Murray wearing his Satanic vestments, on the steps of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Riverside Park. Murray also had a longish moment reading the Tarot. The camera studied each card intently while the sound track continued to play the temple theme, "Anitra's Dance". Eric's big moment came after "The Tower" was turned up. He picked up the card, scowled, and returned it to the deck. The music changed to "Asa's Death". He looked still grimmer: slow fade to black. As Eric's most salient character trait was an uninflected, sullen resentment that Murray regarded as butch, in *The Dance of Life* he symbolized Death and other negative vibrations. He never did much more than smoke and glower, but there was always a moment of him doing that somewhere in the middle of each reel, like Harpo's musical interludes in every Marx Brothers movie.

Contrary to the practice of Gary Webb, who scrupled, God-like, to efface the evidences of his own directing presence (even editing out footage into which his shadow might have strayed), Joycelin appeared abundantly in *The Dance of Life*—was, in

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fact, nearly co-extensive with it. Here she was, at the start, striding down Eighth Avenue toward the camera and into Donald's life. Now (with Donald still aiming the camera) she was fiddling the dials on the phonograph. (In tribute to the Orpheus of Cocteau.) Holding up the record sleeve of *Revolver*. Feeding a squirrel in Central Park. Standing in the empty band shell and clapping her hands with enigmatic ill temper. (They'd had their first argument, and she was making fun of him.)

Here was Joycelin glueing acoustical egg cartons to the walls of her bedroom, and re-glueing them as they fell off. Here she was coming down Eighth Avenue again. You could see the smile being jarred from her mouth as she walked. The expression that lingered in the closeup was one of mild, moist avidity. Someone in the theater (it sounded like Helen Emerson) actually snickered, but then it was time for Doris and Murray to do their thing on the temple steps, a sequence so typical of the Foundation's offerings that no one dared say boo.

Joycelin next accepted a bouquet of pilfered tulips from Doris's hand, Doris having become a statue. Cut to Joycelin's favorite M.C. Escher poster, then pan down to Joycelin arranging the tulips in a glass. Then, in a moment of understated candor, the camera (with Joycelin guiding it now) examined Donald's clothing draped over a semi-deflated inflatable chair. Clouds scudded, Squirrel Nutkin nibbled away, the Hudson flowed softly by, and she ended her song with a reprise of herself advancing in slow motion down Eighth Avenue, while, voice-over, she intoned a stanza from a poem she'd found in *Strengths*, a mimeo magazine of feminist poetry:

i love you
for the way you see
Innermost Me
i love you
for the strong caress
of your fingers in my heart
& how they always seem to know

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what parts are spoiled
& pass them over
to pull out treasures
that I never knew were mine
until you gave them to me

The terminal closeup of Joycelin's face slowly faded to white. As the last wisps of eyebrow evanesced, a wee small voice went on:

i love you
for the self-beauty
i behold
gleaming like diamonds
in the priceless setting
of your eye

The applause stopped short of an ovation, and after that in the discussion period no one had anything to discuss. Ordinarily Donald could have got the ball rolling, but the poem, which had been added to the sound track as a last-minute valentine surprise, had thrown him off his usual moderating form.

He started the next movie, a slapstick parody of *Star Trek* by a ninth-grader at the Bronx High School of Science. People laughed at it perhaps more than it deserved. Joycelin got up in the middle and left the theater. After a short argument with Eric, Murray followed her out.

One forgets, during one's own romances, that it is a curse to fall in love. This time, for Donald, this had been apparent from the start, nor would it ever cease to be apparent. He was appalled at his heart's election. But there it was—he loved her. Worse, he lusted after her continually with the fixated, somnambulistic desire of Peter Lorre in *M* or a bride of Dracula. Waking he thought of her, sleeping he dreamed of her. It was the real thing, which there is no resisting.

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After hours at the Europa, if he were not in demand at her apartment on East 13th, he would watch, entranced, reel after reel of *The Dance of Life* (which earlier had borne the title, *Dance of the Moon-Girl*) and wonder: Why? Why me? Why Mimi?

Mimi was his pet name for her (Squirrel Nutkin was hers for him), after Puccini's Mimi, and in particular after the Mimi of Marguerite Ruffino, of the Ruffino Opera Company, which put on grand operas at an Off-Broadway theater on Monday nights, when it was closed. The company was financed by Marguerite's husband, a retired fireman, and in every production she sang the leading soprano role with a headlong, blissed-out inadequacy that kept her fans coming back steadily for more. Donald had seen her in *Aida*, in *Norma*, in *Cosi Fan Tutti*, and in *La Gioconda*, but her greatest role, surely, was Mimi. No *Boheme* had ever been sadder, nor truer-to-life, than the Ruffino's.

Pity—that had been Donald's downfall. All his life he had loved losers, losing, loss. At zoos his favorite animal was the yak, yearning hopelessly behind its bars for the peanuts no one wished or dared to feed it. He had pretended to find a higher wisdom in the more kindly varieties of ignorance, a Woolfean beauty in faces that were unarguably ill-formed, and hidden forces throbbing in the filmic daydreams of the weak, the lazy, and the incompetent. Seeing this vice apotheosized in the love he felt for Joycelin did nothing to diminish his passion for her, but it did enable him to see how thoroughly he resented everyone else who took up space in his life. His friends! He wanted nothing but to be rid of them. No, even more he wanted a revenge for the decades he had spent praising their meretricious work—and he began to see how, beautifully and without a single overt betrayal, he might obtain it.

Unless she were filming and needed the light, Joycelin slept till two or three o'clock. This, together with the penchant of most twenty-year-olds for self-examination, allowed her, even after a second bout of love-making, to go on talking all night

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long—about her past, about her latest ideas for *The Dance of Life*, about what she'd do with his apartment if it were hers, about Murray and Doris and her boss at May's Department Store, where she worked four nights a week in Accounts. Her boss had it in for her.

"Because," she explained one night, "I'm Jewish."

"I didn't know you were Jewish."

The burning tip of her cigarette bobbed up and down in the dark. "I am. On the side of my mother's grandmother. Her name was Kleinholz."

"But that doesn't necessarily mean—"

"People think Shrager is Jewish, but it isn't."

"It never occurred to me to think so. You don't *look* Jewish."

"People can sense it in me."

She was fired three days later. Proof, if any proof were needed, that anti-semitism had struck again.

She was certain that Donald was concealing his true opinion of her. The books in his bookcase, the records on his closet shelves were unlike her books and records. Chance remarks required long footnotes of explanation. His friends were inattentive, and she didn't find their jokes funny. He said their humor was just a shorthand form of gossip, but that was no help. If they talked in riddles, how could she ever be sure it wasn't *her* they were gossiping about? Anyhow (she wanted him to know) her friends didn't care much for *him* either. Murray thought he was a phony. He'd done a chart of Donald and found out terrible things.

The easiest way to calm her at such times was not to urge the sincerity of his admiration but to make love. She seemed to take his uxoriousness as her due, never offering any of those erotic concessions that a typical underdog believes will earn the ravished gratitude of the beloved, just lying back and yielding to his ardors. It astonished him, in his more reflective moments, how accepting she was of her own substandard goods. A Nigerian tribesman who has come into possession of a Land

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Rover could not have been more reverently admiring of his treasure than was Joycelin of the machineries of her flesh. Mirrors never fazed her, and she could pass by any shop window in the city and instantly translate its mannequins into images of self. She wasn't (she knew) pretty, not in any conventional way at least, but the fairies who'd presided at her birth had made up for that lack with other gifts, and the light of them shone in her eyes. This was how her father had explained the matter to her in the once-upon-a-time of Cleveland, and that mustard seed had grown into a perduring, mountain-moving faith.

And yet she was uneasy. She revealed that in high school she had been known as Miss Bug. Once she'd taken a beginners' class with Doris's teacher in Brooklyn Heights and realized that the woman was making fun of her behind her back.

"That's what hurts, you know. Because you have to pretend you haven't noticed. Why couldn't she just come out and criticize me in the open? I know I'm no Pavlova or anything, but still. With a little more encouragement I'd have got the hang of it. I'm a born dancer, really. Murray thinks I must have been a ballerina in one of my previous lives. There's certain pieces of music that when I hear them it's like *The Red Shoes* all over again."

"You shouldn't let one person's opinion get you down like that."

"You're right, I know. But still."

She waited. He knew what she wanted from him, and it aroused him to be able, expertly, to supply it. It was easy in the dark. "You know, Mimi, the simplest things you do, just walking across a room maybe, or sitting down to eat, they have a kind of strange gracefulness. It *is* like dancing."

"Really? I don't try to."

"It's probably unconscious. Like a cat."

"Yeah?"

She wanted more, but he didn't have any immediately at hand. All he could think of was Cupcake, his super's fat spayed calico, who rode the elevator up and down all day in the

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hope of getting to the garbage in the basement.

"Penny for your thoughts," she insisted.

"I was thinking about us."

An egg carton fell from the wall.

She waited.

"I was thinking how sometimes it's as though there'd been a disaster, like in *The Last Man on Earth*, if you ever saw that?"

"*I* feel like that at times. Completely alone."

"Except in my scenario you're there too. Just you and me and the ruins."

"Why you dirty old man! You're the one who's like a cat—an old tomcat. Stop that!"

"I can't, baby. Anyhow, we've got to get the world re-populated again."

"No, seriously, Squirrel Nutkin. You've just given me an incredible idea for the next part of *Dance*. And if I don't write it down I might forget."

She was up till dawn. Scribble, scribble, scribble.

He would arrange get-togethers with his oldest, dearest, so-called friends and let the fact of Joycelin sink in as they ate her parsimonious stews and meat loaves. Then, when the dishes had been cleared away, they'd watch *The Dance of Life*. With a soldier-like pleasure in his own remorseless fidelity, he squeezed wan compliments from his boggled colleagues. There were years and years of debts to be collected in this way, and Donald was careful never to exact more than the interest on the principal, so that in a few months he might press for renewed courtesies.

With Joycelin, increase of appetite grew by what it fed on, and when the first faltering praise trickled to a stop—the strained comparisons to Merce Cunningham or tantric art—she would nod demurely (making a note of such novelties in her mental notebook) and then ask for *criticism*. She admitted she was young and had rough edges. While in one sense her faults were part of her Gestalts (and therefore sacrosanct), on the other hand she was still growing and learning, and so any

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advice was welcome. For instance, in the long tracking shot of Doris, did the degree of jiggle perhaps exceed the ideal? Did the uncertainty of what was happening detract from the Vision she'd meant to get across? Most guests survived these minefields by adopting the theory offered them—that all their hostess needed was a little more know-how vis-a-vis equipment, a little polish to bring out the natural beauty of the grain.

However. There were, inevitably, a handful who lacked the everyday aplomb to conceal their honest horror. Of these Mike Georgiadis was the most shameless, as well as the most cowardly, for he didn't even wait for the bedsheets to be tacked up screen-wise on the wall before he was in flight, leaving poor Helen Emerson and Rafe Kramer to cope on their own. Helen in her day had soaked up God only knew how many fifths of Donald's Jim Beam, and Rafe had been dumping his little abnormalities into Donald's all-accommodating psychic lap for half their lifetimes, like an eternal festival of the murky, lubricious movies for which he had once won, with the wind of Donald's reviews in his sails, a Ford Foundation grant no less. Even *they* betrayed him that night. Helen first, by bursting out, at the end of the jug of Gallo Hearty Burgundy, with the awful pronouncement that Joycelin's case was hopeless. That she was not an artist. That she never could be an artist, and that surely in her heart of hearts she must know this too.

In the face of such gorgon truths what use was there talking about camera angles, shooting ratios, film stocks? Joycelin became tearful and appealed to Rafe.

Rafe was mute.

Helen, with implacable good will, said was it so important after all? People fussed too much about art. There were other things. Life. People. Pleasure. Love. Enlightenment.

Joycelin turned to stone.

Donald bit the bullet. "Helen," he said, echoing her tone of creamy reasonableness, "you *know* that what you're saying just isn't so. When you consider the budgets that Joycelin has had to work with, I think she's made better films than any of

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us. They're utterly honest. They're like doorways straight into her heart."

"Better than any of us?" Rafe insisted with mild amaze.

"Damned right."

"We're the has-beens," Helen declaimed, slipping into her English accent. "The bankrupts. The burnt-out cases. Isn't that so, Donald?"

"*I* didn't say it."

"And Gary?" Rafe demanded. "Is he another has-been?"

"You know how much I've always admired Gary's work, Rafe. But yes, I do think *The Dance of Life* is right up there with the best things Gary Webb has ever done. And Joycelin's still growing."

It was enough. Joycelin's composure was restored, and she it was who smoothed these waters with the assurance that nothing was worth old friends losing their tempers over. The Sara Lee cheesecake must be thawed by now. Why didn't they eat it?

The September issue of *Footage* had a long essay by Donald about *The Dance of Life*. He waited till it was in print to show Joycelin. As she read the article, a look came into her eyes. A look such as you might glimpse on a baby's wholly contented face, when its every need has been fulfilled: the understanding, for the first time, that there is a Future and that it will suffice.

Afterwards he regretted that he hadn't thought to film her at that moment, for he was beginning to think of *The Dance of Life* as his own movie too, and even, in an odd way, to believe in it.

Donald had three rooms in a brownstone around the corner from the Europa. Since he'd been there time out of mind his rent was less than Joycelin's, though she had only a narrow studio with a bathroom that she had to share with Murray. Donald's apartment, though no less ratty in its essentials, was of a less effortful kind of grunginess than hers. The furniture

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was off the streets or inherited from friends. Never had he deceived himself into attempting improvements, not by so much as a pine bookshelf. Things piled up of their own accord, on windowsills and tabletops, in corners and closets, and increasingly they were Joycelin's things: her stereo (after it had been repaired); her paperbacks; her seven coleus plants; the Escher poster, a rug, a chair; most of her clothes; even the precious Bolex Rex-4 and the rest of her equipment, since his neighborhood was marginally safer and the windows had bars.

At last after a serious talk they agreed they were being ridiculous in keeping up two apartments. Even if it meant forfeiting her two months' deposit, wasn't that better than paying rent forever for a place that they spent so little time in and that had never been more anyhow than a temporary expedient?

So they borrowed Lloyd Watts' station wagon, and early one Tuesday morning they loaded it with whatever was still worth salvaging from East 13th Street, which was not a lot. Most painful to relinquish was an armchair that Joycelin had schlepped all the way from Avenue A, but she had to admit it was too bulky and probably (serviceable as it still was) full of roaches. There was a problem, too, with the toaster and the electric coffee pot, since Donald already had the best Korvette's could offer. But you can't just leave armchairs and appliances behind, like the old bags and paint cans under the sink. So, even though he didn't answer his door, it was determined that Murray was to be the inheritor of these and other orphaned articles: a lidless blue roasting pan, some empty flower pots, a can of turtle food for turtles that had died, a wealth of coat hangers, and a bicycle pump. Joycelin didn't have a key to Murray's room, but she knew how to jimmy his lock.

The room was painted a uniform, Satanic black—floor, walls, ceiling, window—and all the lightbulbs were gone from the sockets. They might very well have moved in all the presents without seeing Murray at all if Donald hadn't thought to light the room by opening the refrigerator door.

Their first thought was burglars. But burglars would not

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have dressed Murray so carefully in his cabalistic coat and hat and left him in the middle of a pentagram. No, it was Nembutals, as it had been twice before.

The reasons were not far to seek. Only a week after meeting Jesse Aarons at that fatal Sunday screening of *The Dance of Life*, Eric had got a part in a gay porn feature called *The Boys in the Bathroom*, and now he was living in a sadomasochistic commune in Westbeth. He wouldn't even talk to Murray on the phone. At the same time, more delicately but no less definitely, Joycelin had left him to mount the ladder of *her* success. He couldn't even be her cameraman now. What was left?

They got him to Bellevue in the station wagon and his stomach was pumped out in time. All the way back to 13th Street, where they'd forgot to close the doors, Joycelin couldn't get over her awesome intuition. What force had led her to Murray at his darkest hour and made her break down his door?

Then she remembered the Tower. Right there in *The Dance of Life* was the answer, plain as day. From the moment he'd turned up that card, she should have known. Perhaps (was it so impossible?) she had!

Next day she was back at Bellevue with Murray's billfold (he needed his Medicaid I.D.), a pillowcase full of fresh underwear and socks, and the old Bolex Rex-4 around her neck. The guard wouldn't let her into the elevator with her camera (these were the days of the Willowbrook scandal, and warnings were out), and so the only footage she could get to illustrate this momentous chapter of her life was some very dark shots of the lobby and her argument with the nurse, and a long, careful pan of hundreds and hundreds of windows, behind one of which, unseen by Joycelin and never to be seen by her again, a pacified Murray in clean blue pajamas was playing dominoes with a Jehovah's Witness, who had threatened to jump from the balcony of Carnegie Hall during a Judy Collins concert until an usher could convince him not to.

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At Christmas Donald spent a small fortune on Joycelin, his jo. In addition to such basic too-muchness as perfume, an amber necklace, and a Ritz Thrift Shop mink, there was: a cased set of Japanese lenses and filters, a four-hundred-foot magazine for the Bolex with sixteen giant spools of Kodak Four-X, a professional tripod with a fluid pan head, three quartz lighting heads in their own carrying case, a Nagra quarter-inch tape recorder, assorted mikes, and a mixer. He'd stopped short of an editing machine, reflecting that there'd be time for that extravagance next time.

When all these treasures had been neatly wrapped in the most expensive gold paper with bushy red satin bows and stowed beneath and about the Christmas tree, itself a monument to his fiscal incontinence, he felt, supremely, the delirium of his own self-inflicted loving-madness. *O sink hernieder!* And he was sinking. At last he could understand those millionaires in Balzac who squander their fortunes on floozies, or those doctors and lawyers in Scarsdale and White Plains whose savage delight it is to see their money transmogrified into tall gravestones of coiled hair surmounting their wives' irredeemable faces, into parabolas of pearls declining into the dry crevasses between two withered dugs, into the droll artifice of evening gowns, whose deceits, like the sermons of Episcopalians, no one is expected to believe.

The unwrapping began as a responsible masque of gratitude and surprise and ended in genuine anxiety infused with disbelief. Without working out the arithmetic, she could not but wonder how, unless he were a stockbroker in disguise, Donald could have afforded all of this.

At last, when they were sitting down with their eggnogs in front of the electric Yule log, she had to ask.

"It's simple. I sold the magazine."

"You sold *Footage*. That's terrible!"

"I'm keeping my column in it. That's down in writing. All I'm giving up is the drudgery, and Jesse is welcome to that."

"Jesse Aarons?" she asked, as he snuffled in the loose flesh of her neck.

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"You see. . . ." He curbed the stallion of desire, leaned back in the nest of hand-crafted pillows that had been Joycelin's merry gift to him, and exposited. "Jesse had the idea, some while ago, that there should be a *serious* magazine about skin flicks. Something that would do for porn what *Cahiers* did for Hollywood, make it look intellectual. At the time I'd used a couple of his articles along those lines, but I couldn't see taking the whole magazine in that direction."

"I should hope not. But then why—?"

"Five thousand dollars."

Joycelin set down her eggnog on the new Nagra and became serious. "But just last week, Donald, Jesse *borrowed* eighty dollars from you."

"The money doesn't come directly from Jesse. Harold Bachofen was the purchaser, but his name won't go on the masthead. Though Arnold's will, of course. Harold screwed Jesse out of the profits on *Ear, Nose, and Throat* last year, and he's giving him *Footage* by way of an apology. I think he wants a slice of his next feature now that Jesse's star is on the rise."

"I still don't think you should have done it. I mean, *Footage* was worth a lot more than five thousand dollars. It's the most respected magazine in the field."

"Every issue of that respected magazine puts me two hundred dollars in the red. When I'm lucky. We've got better things to do with our money."

"You should at least have waited to find out whether I get my CAPS grant or not. If Helen Emerson can get a CAPS grant, I don't see why I can't."

"Absolutely, Mimi, my love. All in good time. But meanwhile, five thousand dollars is five thousand dollars." He poured the last of the eggnog into her glass.

She sipped and thought. Fake firelight from the Yule log rippled over her Art Deco negligee. She struck an attitude—elbow propped on the arm of the couch, chin resting on the back of her hand—suggestive of close attention to music not audible to other ears than hers. At such moments Donald was sure she was thinking: "Is he looking at me now?" But this

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time her thoughts had truly been on a larger, philosophic scale, for when she came out of it, it was to declare, with all the hushed solemnity of a presidential press secretary, that Donald had done the right thing and that she was proud of him. And very happy.

The first issue of *Footage* to come out under Jesse Aaron's aegis had for its cover a still from *The Dance of Life* that showed Eric in a denim jacket, squinting at the smoke of his cigarette. It looked every bit like a face on the cover of a real magazine. Joycelin gazed and gazed, insatiable. There was also another nice little mention in Donald's column.

"I wonder. . . ."

"What do you wonder, my love?"

"Whether I shouldn't try and get in touch with Eric again. I mean, he has been so much a part of *Dance* right from the start. Just because he isn't with Murray anymore—"

"What about Murray? Did you ever find out his address?"

"No, and I don't care if I ever do. The bastard."

Murray had gone off to San Francisco without ever saying good-bye, much less thanking her for his life. The transition between concern for Murray's mental health to bitterness at this snub had been difficult to accomplish.

"Bastard?"

"Well, I wasn't going to tell you this, but you know how Murray was always telling everyone how he was a Scorpio? He's not. When I had to bring him his things to the hospital, I looked in his billfold. Where it says date of birth on his draft card, the date was January 28th, 1937. An Aquarius! His *moon* isn't even in Scorpio, for God's sake. I looked it up, and it's in Capricorn."

"He probably thought he'd be more interesting as a Scorpio."

"Of course that's what he thought. But that doesn't make it right, does it? There's one thing I can't stand, and that's a liar. I mean, if your own friends *lie* to you, how can you believe *anything*?"

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The wedding was in June, at St. Mark's In The Bowery. Joycelin's parents were to have come, but at the last moment (not unexpectedly) her mother came down with shingles, so Harold Bachofen acted *in loco parentis* and did very well. Joycelin's gown was a collaboration between herself and Doris Del Ray—a white silk muumuu swathed in tulle, with a veil and train that were one and the same. Donald dressed white tie, as did Harold Bachofen. Everyone else came in whatever they regarded as regal, which included, in at least one instance, drag.

The theme of the wedding, in any case, was not to have been fashion, but *film*. Everyone who owned or could borrow a camera was told to bring it to St. Mark's and shoot, the resulting trousseau of footage to be incorporated into a single grandiose wedding march in *The Dance of Life*. Since the invitation list included everyone in underground film who hadn't actively snubbed Joycelin, the results were gratifyingly spectacular. Donald stopped counting cameras at twenty-three. As a final dollop of authentication, a news team from Eyewitness News appeared just as the bride was being led to the altar. (Donald's former brother-in-law, Ned Miles, was now an executive at Channel 7.) The wedding, alas, was squeezed out of the news that night by an especially sinister double-murder in Queens, but the news team made it into *The Dance of Life*. They were the only people in the whole church who seemed at all astonished at what was happening.

And Joycelin? She was radiant. True movie stars, Donald had theorized once in *Footage*, actually receive energy from the camera, or from the cameraman, like plants getting energy from the sun. They become more alive, more definite, more completely who they are, like the dead on the Day of Judgment when they arise, wartless and cleansed of all the local accidents of character: the skeletons of their essential Selves. So too Joycelin, whose special and enthralling awfulness always awoke to greatest vividness when she was being filmed. And today . . . today with cameras springing up like daisies in a field, today there was no reckoning her transcendency. Roland

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Barthes says of Garbo that her face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced, a state in which "the flesh gives rise to mystical feelings of perdition." In this respect Joycelin and Garbo were much alike.

The filming continued at The Old Reliable, where the reception was held. As Donald had been temporarily overwhelmed, Joycelin and Doris took it on themselves to collect the contributions to the Foundation for Free Cinema, which was what they'd requested in lieu of conventional wedding gifts. People got drunk too quickly, a crush developed, and Jesse Aarons got into a fight. The bride and groom left early.

Joycelin was kittenish, not to say petulant, in the cab, and when they arrived home she insisted on a bride's prerogative of having the bedroom to herself. Donald undressed down to his shorts, and then passed the time drinking from the bottle of Asti Spumanti he'd rescued from the reception. It was flat. He didn't feel so wonderful himself. Great and long-awaited events do take it out of you.

He tried to get into the bedroom but Joycelin had locked the door, so he watched Eyewitness News. They showed the actual bloodstains in the stairwell where the woman had been stabbed. Forty-seven times. And the woman's niece as well.

At last she said to come in.

The dear old Bolex, on its new tripod, with its four-hundred-foot magazine in place, was set up facing the bed. The quartz lighting heads blazed down on the turned-back sheets like the desert sun.

"Surprise!" She was wearing nothing but the one-piece veil and train.

He could not pretend to disapprove on either moral or esthetic grounds. Joycelin had not only seen *Reel 168*—she'd read Donald's reviews of it. The principle was the same. But still.

"Mimi, darling . . . . I don't think I can. Not at this moment."

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"That's all right, Donald. Take your time."

He went and sat at the foot of the bed, facing the eye of the lens. "Any other time, but not tonight. That reception got me down, I think. Seeing all those people I haven't seen in so long."

"You don't have to apologize to *me*. Just sit right where you are and say what you're feeling. Whatever it may be. Now that we're married it's like we're just one person. *Dance* is yours now as much as it's mine. Really."

She started the camera rolling. Unconsciously he'd placed his hands in front of his listless crotch. He could not look up.

She held out the directional mike. "Just say anything. Whatever you're thinking. Because whatever *is*—is right."

He was thinking about failure, which seemed, tonight, the universal fact of human life. But he couldn't say that. His thoughts were sealed inside his head like the documents in the cornerstone of a building. They could never come out.

"Hey there! Squirrel Nutkin! Look at the camera, huh? Say cheese."

He looked up at the camera and began to cry. For her, for him, for all his friends—for the dance of life.

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The Art of Fiction LIX
Kingsley Amis

Fay Godwin

Hailed as an Angry Young Man on the publication of his rollicking and irreverent first novel, Lucky Jim *(1954), Kingsley Amis continued to be regarded as primarily a comic novelist for several years afterwards, although the grave side of his purpose was already apparent in* Take a Girl Like You *(1956). But it was not until* The Anti-Death League *(1965), which he described as "a protest against death and an attack on the Christian God," that Amis served public notice of his wish to be taken seriously.*

In recent years Amis has demonstrated remarkable versatility. As well as poetry and belles-lettres, he has published

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three straight novels, I Want It Now *(1968),* Girl 20 *(1971) and* Ending Up *(1974), and an assortment of genre fiction: (as Robert Markham)* Colonel Sun *(1968), a spy thriller featuring a resurrected James Bond,* The Green Man *(1969), a ghost story, and* The Riverside Villas Murder, *a classic mystery story.*

His academic career has been almost as varied. From 1949 until 1961 he lectured in English at University College, Swansea, and from 1961 until 1963 was a Fellow of Peterhouse College, Cambridge. He also spent a year as Visiting Fellow in Creative Writing at Princeton, 1958-9, and was Visiting Professor at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, in 1967.

At present he lives in High Barnet, an outer suburb north of London, in a large, early nineteenth century house beside a wooded common. To reach it, one makes a similar journey to that described by the narrator of Girl 20 *when he visits Sir Roy Vandervane: first by tube to the end of the Northern Line at Barnet, then, following a phone call from the station to say where one is, on foot up a stiff slope and then down a suburban road. But instead of being picked up en route by Sir Roy's black chum, Gilbert, I was intercepted by Amis's tall and imposing blonde wife, the novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard.*

Amis's study was a picture of Bohemian disorder. Scattered across the floor were several teetering piles of poetry books and a mass of old 78 r.p.m. jazz records, while the big Adler typewriter on his desk was almost hidden behind a screen of empty bottles of sparkling wine which he'd recently sampled in his capacity as Drink Correspondent of Penthouse. *A more sober note was struck by some shelves containing a complete* Encyclopaedia Britannica, *a thirteen volume* OED *and various other authoritative tomes, but this was quickly dispelled by the sight of a small sherry cask in one corner full, I was told, of whiskey.*

For someone whose only regular exercise is strolling to and from the local pub, Amis at fifty-three is well preserved, with just a modest paunch hinted at beneath the light

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blue pullover and brown slacks he was wearing when we met. Early photos show him with thick wavy hair; it's grey now, but there's still plenty of it, conventionally styled, and only a little longer at the back and sides than twenty years ago. He has a mobile face that lends itself to the impersonations for which he is famous (and of which I caught a tantalizingly brief glimpse), and an educated but far from affected voice that reminds one at times of the actor, Kenneth More's. The interview did not take place in his study, but in a pleasant, book-lined sitting room with a prospect of the back lawn through lofty French windows. We talked for about two hours, from eleven-fifteen until one-fifteen, Amis perched on the edge of a sofa rather than sitting back in it so as not to provoke a troublesome recording. He chose his words carefully, sometimes pausing to think things out, but rarely needing to rephrase an answer. At about midday he had a Scotch, which was replenished shortly before the interview closed.

INTERVIEWER

You've said that "until the age of twenty-four, I was in all departments of writing *abnormally unpromising*." This suggests that you *were* trying to write before this.

AMIS

Oh, indeed yes. I've been trying to write for as long as I can remember. But those first fifteen years didn't produce much of great interest. I mean, it embarrasses me very much to look back on my early poems—very few lines of any merit at all and lots of affectation. But there were quite a lot of them. That's a point in one's favor, I think, to work these poisons out of one's system on paper: bad influences, like Dylan Thomas and Yeats—I'm not saying they're bad poets, but I do think they're bad influences, especially on a young writer. As regards prose, that was even worse. My first novel, which will never see the light of day, was really affectation from beginning to end—well, it did have a few jokes which I lifted for later stuff, and some bits of background from the town I

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was living in at the time. Berkhampsted, that were usable in *Take A Girl Like You*, many years later.

INTERVIEWER

Have you always had the capacity for making people laugh?

AMIS

I was the, or a, school wit at twelve years old. Well, not wit exactly—someone who could imitate the masters. I've always been a fair mimic; one of my party pieces is FDR as heard by the British over short-wave radio in 1940. This perhaps has something to do with writing fiction; a novelist is a sort of mimic by definition.

INTERVIEWER

Did the fact that you were an only child have any bearing on your development as a writer? Either the amount of reading you did, or the fact that you had to use your imagination more?

AMIS

I think it's . . . well, writing for me is to a large extent self-entertainment, and the only child is driven to do that. For example, I'm an expert whistler—I won't give you a sample—but that takes hours of practice, the sort of thing one hasn't got time for if one's part of a large family, I imagine. And as for reading, well of course I got a lot done. Again, totally heterogeneous material—what we would now call very bad literature: the boys' comics of those days—which were, of course, compared with today's comics, positively Flaubertian in their style and Dickensian in their character portrayal—all the way up through hardbound books of adventure stories and such, and taking in real writers like Dickens himself, Shakespeare and so on, in much the same sort of spirit. I think it's very important to read widely and in a wide spectrum of merit and ambition on the part of the writer.

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And ever since, I've always been interested in these less respectable forms of writing—the adventure story, the thriller, science-fiction and so on—and this is why I've produced one or two examples myself. I read somewhere recently somebody saying: "When I want to read a book, I write one." I think that's very good. It puts its finger on it, because there are never enough books of the kind one likes: one adds to the stock for one's own entertainment.

INTERVIEWER

Did you draw on your childhood memories for *The Riverside Villas Murder*?

AMIS

To some extent. None of the events: I wasn't lucky enough to be seduced by the pretty next-door neighbor, nor did I find a corpse in the sitting room. But the feeling and the adolescent attitudes were as close as I could remember to my own. The attitude to sex, to girls, to parents and school—that was all out of my emotional experience.

INTERVIEWER

You served in the Royal Signals in the war. Did *My Enemy's Enemy* owe anything to this?

AMIS

Well, as you know, there were three stories of Army life. And the shortest one, *Court of Enquiry*, was based on an experience of my own. I was the unfortunate Lieutenant Archer who was given a bad time by his Company Comander. But the other two stories were total fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Archer describes his vision of an acceptable post-war England as "as full of girls and drink and jazz and books and decent houses and decent jobs and being your own boss." Was this your England, too?

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AMIS

Oh, yes, that's very much how I felt. And when I voted Labour by proxy in 1945, this is what I had in mind. I didn't expect the Government to bring me girls, but I did share in the general feeling of optimism and liberty abroad at that time.

INTERVIEWER

Did you publish anything before *Lucky Jim*?

AMIS

Right at the end of my Oxford stay I co-edited *Oxford Poems 1949* with James Michie, and naturally got some of my own poems into that. But apart from poems and a review or two, I don't think there was anything.

INTERVIEWER

There still seem to be misconceptions about the origins of *Lucky Jim*. Am I right in saying that it wasn't based on Swansea University, where you were lecturing at the time?

AMIS

Yes. It was conceived, if that's the right word, way back in 1946, when I happened to visit Philip Larkin, who was on the Library Staff at Leicester University. The young man surrounded by bores who for various reasons he doesn't dare to offend—that was all there. The contribution of Swansea, so to speak, was just to give me information about how things were run: what the Faculty is, who the Registrar is and what he does, what classes are like, what exam responsibilities are like etc. But there's no character in the book, however minor, who was actually there at Swansea.

INTERVIEWER

Why was *Lucky Jim* such a long time coming?

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AMIS

Well, being busy and being lazy, which so often go together. My first year at Oxford after the war was spent celebrating not being in the Army. Then I had to work hard for my final exams. At Swansea it took me some time to get to grips with the heavy work-load, and meanwhile there were also domestic responsibilities in the form of a wife and two young children who turned up very fast, one after the other. And another point was lack of a possible place to write in. The only requirement, I think, is a room to oneself, however small. Fortunately my wife received a small legacy and we got a house in Swansea which had such a room in it and *instantly* I began *Lucky Jim*. But that was a slow process: I had to redraft the whole thing. The first draft was very feeble, so I showed it to friends, particularly Philip Larkin again who made very constructive suggestions. And then I started again from scratch, a thing I haven't done since. So it was not only delayed by external circumstances, but also, I think, by inexperience.

INTERVIEWER

I think it's difficult for anyone under thirty today to see Jim as a true rebel, despite what he may have appeared then.

AMIS

Yes, well, rebellion escalates, doesn't it? My father thought that he, my father, was a rebel. Though of course by the time I was taking any notice of his views, he was as stolidly conservative, not to say reactionary, as anybody I've ever met. And it's true that Jim's rebelliousness is by any standards mild, certainly by today's standards. But then I think the degree to which he was intended to be seen by the author as a rebel has been exaggerated. He didn't want to change the System. He certainly didn't want to *destroy* the System.

INTERVIEWER

He wanted to be his own man?

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AMIS

Yes. He didn't like the bits of the System that were immediately in his neighbourhood, that was all. If he had happened to be in the Music department, the Professor of which is sympathetically portrayed, I think he'd have had a very different time.

INTERVIEWER

What was your reaction to being called an Angry Young Man?

AMIS

Mixed. I mean no writer, especially a young and unknown writer, resents publicity of any kind—whatever he may say. I'm sure I didn't. But the other side of that was being lumped together with some very strange people. Again, not that I'm denigrating them. But all of us in that non-existent Movement—which is really only a string of names—felt that, I think. But this is what literary journalists have to do, don't they?—discern trends and groups even when there isn't much of a trend, and nothing in the way of a group.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think it's ironic that many of the so-called Angries like William Cooper, John Wain, John Braine and yourself were writing in a traditional style?

AMIS

Yes, there was certainly no rebelliousness at all of treatment or presentation. And we were, in that sense, reactionaries rather than rebels. We were trying to get back, let's say, to the pre-Joyce tradition, really—but not very consciously. It's always dangerous to suppose that what looks in retrospect like something planned, something willed, was actually planned at the time. This is all a matter of instinct, of feeling. But there was a general resemblance to that degree.

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INTERVIEWER

What are your own feelings about experimental prose?

AMIS

I can't bear it. I dislike, as I think most readers dislike, being in the slightest doubt about what is taking place, what is meant. I don't want full and literal descriptions of everything, and I'm prepared to take a hint from the author as well as the next man, but I dislike mystification. Part two about Experiment, I'd say, is that it's usually thought of as entirely to do with style and intelligibility. But there are other forms. I mean after all, can't one have experiments in mixing farce and horror, comedy and seriousness . . . ?

INTERVIEWER

As you've tried to do?

AMIS

Yes, though I wouldn't call myself an Experimental writer, because it has this other connotation. But *The Green Man*, for example, in its modest way, was a kind of experiment. I mean, "Can a ghost story be combined with a reasonably serious study of human relations, in this case the problem of selfishness?" The alcoholism is part of that, but the central figure there, Allington, finds himself becoming more and more insecure because he doesn't really take any notice of other people. And the result is that by undergoing these harrowing experiences he at last notices his young daughter, and talks to her in a way that he hasn't done before. So at the price of losing his wife and making an utter fool of himself, he's at last made contact with another person, so one feels in that sense hopeful about his future.

INTERVIEWER

Why are you so unhappy with your third novel, *I Like It Here*?

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AMIS

Well, it was written partly out of bad motives. Seeing that *That Uncertain Feeling* had come out in 1955, and it was now 1957 and there was no novel on the way, I really cobbled it together out of straightforwardly autobiographical experiences in Portugal, with a kind of mystery story rather perfunctorily imposed on that. The critics didn't like it, and I don't blame them really. I had a look at it the other day and parts of it are not too bad. But it's really a very slipshod, lopsided piece of work.

INTERVIEWER

There's one passage in the book that I'd like to use as a cue: the reference to Fielding as "the only non-contemporary novelist who could be read with unaffected and wholehearted interest." Why do you dismiss the vast majority of the Classics like this?

AMIS

Well, this is a hard one. I mean I know that I should read them more, and I know enough about the Classics to know what I'm missing. But . . . it's a question of what one is reading for. And if I read the Classics that I haven't read, it would be out of a sense of duty. It's not that I don't admire many of the Classics, but it's a distant and rather too respectful admiration.

INTERVIEWER

Did having to teach English Literature exacerbate this?

AMIS

No, in a way it had the opposite effect. Being forced by the syllabus to read all those unread people was good—I got a lot of entertainment out of it, and I found out a lot. Again, one can't say this had any direct effect on what I wrote.

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INTERVIEWER

What is it about Fielding that you like?

AMIS

Well, I describe it to some extent in the passage you mention. Apart from his wit, and, I think, attractive, though sometimes heavy irony, he seems to be very concerned not to bore the reader, to keep the narrative going along. And he was great enough to transcend the conventional love story current at his time—well, not transcend exactly, but to write very well and understandably and very deeply within that set of conventions, and I can't think of any other writer who could do that.

INTERVIEWER

Which twentieth century writers have influenced you?

AMIS

Well, there's the early Joyce, P.G. Wodehouse, Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell, Elizabeth Taylor and early Angus Wilson among novelists. And poets . . . oh, Hardy I admire, but don't feel very warm to—A.E. Housman, Philip Larkin, John Betjeman, the early R.S. Thomas, parts of Robert Frost, parts of Robert Graves, some poems by Yeats. It's not a complete list—in fact I was once worried by this, that I couldn't name more than a dozen admired contemporaries. But I mentioned it to Robert Graves, and he said "Nonsense. You ought to be concerned if you admire *more* than that number. It shows you have no discrimination." Which is a good point!

INTERVIEWER

Waugh was quoted in *The Paris Review* as saying that writing for him was an exercise in the use of language rather than an attempt to explore character. How do you react to this?

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AMIS

I've come to see it in that way more and more. I certainly feel that this is what I'm trying to do. But I think this is connected—and trying not to sound too sombre here—with growing older. Because the world that seemed so various and new, well, it does contract. One's burning desire to investigate human behavior and to make, or imply, statements about it, does fall off. And so one does find that early works are full of energy and also full of vulgarity, crudity and incompetence, and later works are more carefully finished, and in that sense better literary products. But . . . there's often a freshness that is missing in later works—for every gain there's a loss. I think it evens out in that way.

INTERVIEWER

You've described the creation of characters as "a mysterious process." Can you enlarge on that?

AMIS

Yes, well, the whole thing *is* mysterious, and it's interesting that writers with very different approaches all say this as soon as you ask them. They say: "The thoughts that I have are not mine. My works are not my own." And so on . . . . The development of character is a sort of by-product of the development of the central idea. I always start with a situation which may occur to one. Or you may see an example of it in what's around you, and things grow out of that. With *Lucky Jim*, for instance, the situation was this young man surrounded by all these hostile powers, and there was a ready-made setting which seemed to fit this situation. And as soon as one has got this far, a lot of options become closed. With a woman who is a sort of sexual bore, who covers about a third of Jim's life, we're on the road to the kind of person that the character Margaret has got to be. And since the story would be finished if, in the second chapter, Jim said, "Look, leave me alone. Go away.", we *can't* have him say that, he must have reasons for not saying that. And so that develops the

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cowardly, or if you like, decent side of his character. And this happens all the way along in my experience. When you think you're inventing, what you're really doing is following up the implications of your original idea.

INTERVIEWER

I think Waugh said he used suddenly to find his characters taking to drink, or surprising him in other ways.

AMIS

Yes, well this would fall into place later. Graham Greene said he would find an episode or a character turning up after the first ten thousand words which he had no idea how to use. But then thirty thousand words later it would come up. And experience had taught him never to destroy what he had written, because it would always be fitted into the design later.

INTERVIEWER

Do you keep a notebook?

AMIS

Yes, but it's not a very fat notebook. It contains things like scraps of dialogue that one overhears or thinks of . . . very short descriptions of characters . . . comic incidents seen, or conceivably invented. But I don't write synopses. I used to at one time. I mean, I kept a very thick and detailed notebook for *Take A Girl Like You*—about a hundred pages. But I think that was partly nervousness, because I knew that its theme, and using a female protagonist, was going to put a severe strain on my resources. And I was limbering up, as it were, to write that.

INTERVIEWER

I came across an echo of Graham's speech to Jenny on the barrier between the attractive and the unattractive in a recent article about Joe Ackerley.* Apparently E.M. Forster once

* *J.R. Ackerley: Literary Editor of the* Listener, *1935-1959.*

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made the same complaint to Ackerley, who was very handsome as a young man.

AMIS

Really? Yes, well, that idea—the division into Two Nations of the attractive and the unattractive—had been in my mind, as it were independently, for many years. And then the time came, quite suddenly, without realizing it: here was the moment to put these ideas into a character's mouth.

INTERVIEWER

Roger Micheldene, the hero of *One Fat Englishman*, describes America as "a semi-permanent encampment of a nation of parvenus." Was that your own reaction?

AMIS

(*Laughs*) No, not at all. I think the pro- and anti-American stuff hasn't, if I may say so, been properly understood. What I was doing was knocking *British* anti-Americanism, and I thought: "Put all the usual tired old arguments into the mouth of a very unsympathetic character." I thought this was quite a good way of showing up all those British attitudes. But I must have muffed it somewhere along the line because American reviewers fell into two classes: One lot said, "Mr. Amis makes some shrewd hits on the deficiencies in our culture." And they were meant to be very unshrewd hits. Others said, half rightly, "Mr. Amis's objections to American life are very old hat. If they were ever accurate, they no longer are so. It's all been done better by American writers." Well, that's true, except that they got the name wrong. Roger Micheldene's objections were all of those things.

INTERVIEWER

Roger really is a shit of the first water—in the same league as Bertrand Welch and Bernard Bastable. Do you enjoy creating such characters?

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AMIS

Yes. Well, it's very hard to dislike them. I think it was Christopher Ricks, reviewing *One Fat Englishman*, who said, after listing Roger's appalling deficiencies, "nevertheless, one can't help feeling that the author liked the character. I did too." Of course I like him. After all, life tells us all the time that it's possible to like the people that you violently disapprove of—not only from a moral pinnacle—but would hate to find yourself involved with. But nevertheless, I can't help feeling that I'd quite enjoy a couple of drinks with Roger.

INTERVIEWER

Irving Macher, the young novelist, is a pretty nasty piece of work, too.

AMIS

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

I'd like to use him as a cue for a digression on American novelists. You've said, "Not one of them has succeeded in establishing an oeuvre." Isn't that rather a sweeping statement?

AMIS

(*Aggressively*) Yeah? . . . Well, I'd like to hear *your* candidates for that position.

INTERVIEWER

Well, (*pause*) how about Gore Vidal?

AMIS

Yes, well it may be laziness, but on the rare occasions when I do pick up Vidal, whose early books I enjoyed before he was as celebrated as he is now, he seems to me to suffer from American cleverness: the fear of being thought stupid, or

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dull, or behind the times. I think that's a very bad attitude for the novelist to adopt. He must not mind being thought boring and pompous from time to time—let's hope he avoids it—but if he runs too far in the opposite direction, he's heading for disaster.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps we should concentrate on the phrase "establish an oeuvre," which does at least allow that there might have been some very good American novels written.

AMIS

Oh yes, indeed. Individual books, and two or three books or more by many American novelists. But the enemies are smartness, and in many cases, the desire to be American. And being American is, I think, a very difficult thing in Art, because all the elements are European, and to give them a distinctive American stamp is something you can't *try* to do—it can only be hoped that in the end this will emerge. The lure of the Great American Novel—it's no longer, perhaps, the *Great* American Novel, because that sounds like the dull, or traditional American novel—but the Important, the Significant, the New, the most American American Novel . . . I think that marsh light is still burning hard.

INTERVIEWER

By the time *One Fat Englishman* came out, you'd shifted from Swansea to Cambridge. Was it Dr. Leavis who said that Peterhouse had given a Fellowship to a pornographer?

AMIS

So I was told, yes.

INTERVIEWER

But wasn't that all wrong? Because in fact you're not at all explicit about sex.

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AMIS

I wouldn't have thought so. I mean, I have to follow my own rule of always letting readers know what's taking place. But with regard to sexual matters, not in detail. The reader should know whether it took place or not, whether it was a success or not, and what they felt about it. But anybody who can get sexual titillation out of my sex scenes must be very easily stimulated. I shy away from explicit sex mainly because it's socially embarrassing. The comparison I usually draw is with being told these things by an acquaintance—and after all, the novelist is only an acquaintance, isn't he, as far as the reader's concerned?—and to be told in detail what he's been up to for over half an hour—the equivalent of a chapter, say—would be embarrassing, wouldn't it? *I* would find it embarrassing.

INTERVIEWER

Your next novel, *The Anti-Death League*, was something of a watershed. I think you announced that you were no longer content just to do straightforward social comedy. Was this because, as somebody suggested, you weren't being taken seriously because you were funny?

AMIS

Who knows? When starting to think about any novel, part of the motive is: I'm going to show them, this time. Without that, a lot of what passes under the name of creative energy would be lost. It's an egotistical self-assertion, if you like—the mere act of writing a book is that. And it may well be that my feeling when thinking of *The Anti-Death League* was, to some extent, "I'm going to show them that I can be overtly serious." And this did mystify some of the critics. One rang up in some agitation and said, "Can I come see you? I've just read your new book, and I'm not happy about it." I thought, "Oh, dear." So I said, "Come along by all means." I wondered what he wanted—and he had to do this by a series of hints, clearing his throat a great deal—and what it turned out

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to be was: Was I serious? Or was it all an elaborate farce or irony, couched in the form of some supposedly serious story? So I reassured him: I said, "It's all right. Don't worry. The serious parts in that *are* serious." "Right," he said, and gave the thing a favorable notice. The idea that what's funny can't be serious dies hard, but I think it's dying because of *Catch-22*, Evelyn Waugh and so on.

INTERVIEWER

I wondered whether *The Anti-Death League* might have owed something to the changes in your own life at that time.

AMIS

I think that alterations in your own life *may* have an immediate effect on a book. But I think much more usually these things are delayed. What happens in *The Anti-Death League* had been brewing inside me for a long time, the result of realizing that one isn't going to be young forever, and noticing more and more that there is pain and sorrow in the world. And again, ceasing to be young, that there are certain fundamental questions to be answered. I mean, the answer to them all may be "*No.* Nothing." But they've got to be answered, and the novelist naturally answers them for himself in fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Doesn't *The Anti-Death League* contain some of your favorite characters: James Churchill? Brian Leonard?

AMIS

Yes. Max Hunter, Ayscue, and Moti Naidu—

INTERVIEWER

Oh, him too?

AMIS

Yes, in fact he's the favorite of all of them. The novelist always has favorites, and often he's a minor character, as in this

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case. And Naidu is the one I admire most. He's the one who has the right attitudes. I'm no mystic. I'm certainly no Buddhist or Hindu thinker, because being a Westerner, I don't understand any of that. But when Naidu makes his plea to Churchill, saying that Churchill's withdrawal is a selfish escape, and he's *not* thinking of his girlfriend but of himself; and that his enemy is, as he puts it, "bad feelings of all descriptions" which he must try to put away; and that everybody must try to become a man, he is as near to being the author's voice as anybody usually is in one of my novels.

INTERVIEWER

You also kill off L.S. Caton.

AMIS

Well, I was running out of things to do with L.S. Caton, and this was a good place to get rid of him because he clearly had no place in that novel at all. So I brought him in and had him shot. I mean, I thought it was a good idea to have somebody shot, and what better candidate than he?

INTERVIEWER

Colonel Sun seemed to underline your preference for genre fiction over the mainstream novel. Is this because you believe that, say, writers like Eric Ambler, Gavin Lyall and Geoffrey Household are achieving more within their spheres than many straightforward novelists?

AMIS

Well, I start from the same place as the genre writers start from: they cannot afford to bore me, and I cannot stand being bored, so we begin at the same place. And they have all sorts of things forced on them: some sort of pace, a feeling of conflict, climaxes, anti-climaxes, suspense and so on. They have to do that. And having done that, they can then erect other matters.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you think it's easier to strip away the facades of characters when they're in situations of suspense?

AMIS

Oh, yes. That's the old, well-tried and valuable lever that such writers have always used: put people into conditions of extremity of some sort, and you won't find out *all* about them, but you'll get to the inside of them quicker than you would in the "drawing room, gin and Jaguar" type of novel.

INTERVIEWER

Do you keep an ideal reader in mind when you write?

AMIS

Not really, except as regards clarity. Occasionally I say to my wife, "This is what I mean, does what I've written convey it?"

INTERVIEWER

Can writing—humor particularly—be directed by any sort of formula?

AMIS

No, none. I was going to say, "Be unexpected." But then non-comic writing must do that too. And "Be expected" is an important rule too. It's a letdown if the comedian doesn't finally actually really sit on his hat.

INTERVIEWER

You've mentioned science fiction. What is it about it that attracts you?

AMIS

To start with, as always, something rather simple and perhaps even childish. Because I was attracted to it as a lad on sensational grounds: grounds of excitement, wonder—as they

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always say—and a liking for the strange, the possibly horrific. That's the beginning. And then of course as science fiction came out of the pure monster and robot phase and started to do other things, it became a very efficient vehicle for both social satire, and for investigation of the human character in a different way from the straightforward novel: humanity's character considered as a single thing, rather than the characters of individual beings reacting on one another. Of course many science fiction writers aren't equipped to tackle these rather grand themes, but I think it might well happen. So in one way science fiction is more ambitious than the novel we're used to, because these great abstractions can be discussed: immortality, how we feel about the future, what the future means to us, and how much even we're at the mercy of what's happened in the past. All these things it can do.

INTERVIEWER

Is it fair to see *I Want It Now* as an attack on the rich?

AMIS

(*Laughs*) Well, some rich. That's so to speak the vehicle of what the novel is trying to say. It's about power, to some extent, and responsibility. And certain kinds of rich people are notorious for the way they wield power without responsibility. But if you were to ask, "How did you think up *I Want It Now*?," I'd say it began like this: After spending the evening with some very unpleasant rich people in Tennessee, my wife said, "Just think what it would be like to be Mabel's daughter"—Mabel hadn't got a daughter—and I thought, "*Yes*." And so I tried to imagine what it would be like. And then clearly there would have to be a character who was going to come and take her away from this situation, and since he was going to do a kind of Sleeping Beauty operation on her, he must not be at all attractive—at least superficially. So where do we find energetic people who are not at all attractive to all appearances, though with a surface charm and so on?—*Television!* And that is what I meant earlier by one's options

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being closed by the nature of the central situation. "What would it be like to be Mabel's daughter?" Well, that fixes Mabel. That fixes her daughter. It fixes the hero Çliberator character. It fixes his environment, and it also fixes his relations with the people alongside him in television. And then the satellites of the rich woman also fall into place. So an awful lot seems suddenly to have been done for you—I mean, you've done it all yourself, but it feels as if it's suddenly emerged.

INTERVIEWER

This book also contains another of your favorite characters, doesn't it?

AMIS

Oh yes, George Parrott—again a minor character—who switches from being the hero's sworn enemy, to being his unwilling and highly critical ally, rather than his friend. I enjoyed making George up a lot, and had to exercise "artistic restraint" to avoid letting him run away with me. But he began merely as a plot device. Somebody had to give a little bit of help at a critical juncture, and somebody earlier had to appear as a kind of bogey man and the kind of rich suitor that the heroine was used to receiving. Well, to save on the cost, as it were, those have got to be the same chap. Oh, and he also had to give the hero some information, and it was really that, I suppose, which made him develop. Because if a character is to impart essential information, and to have to spend two or three pages doing so, then clearly to avoid boring the reader if possible, the author's got to take a lot of trouble with that character's conversational style and try to make it internally amusing, as well as merely a vehicle for conveying the essential information. So Parrott's style of expression had to be eccentric, which again gives the character more depth, I suppose.

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INTERVIEWER

As you said earlier, Maurice Allington, the hero of *The Green Man*, is an alcoholic. Can we talk about drink—

AMIS

Sure, any time—

INTERVIEWER

Specifically, the part it plays in your novels, and, if relevant, the part it plays in your creative life?

AMIS

Yes. Well, as far as my books are concerned, it's a device that corresponds to the thriller writer's lever of being able to strip a character rather bare quite quickly and fairly plausibly. I don't say that the drunk man is the real man, and the sober man merely a shell. But you find out something different about people when they're drunk. Of course, you sometimes find that they're not different at all—that you merely get more of the same, perhaps said rather more loudly and incoherently, but basically the same. Other people change. Allington's alcoholism—or near-alcoholism, because he's still able to run his life and the inn—was a plot detail that occurred to me very early. I don't think it had been done before: ghosts that are seen only by an alcoholic, and so can be dismissed as delirium, or fancies, or even as lies. So it had that function, as well.

INTERVIEWER

I think you've also said that pubs have a special role in your books.

AMIS

This is very much a thing in my own life, as well. The pub is the great piece of neutral territory, for which there are rules, as there are in other parts of social life, but they're rather different rules. And of course some kinds of people

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dislike pubs. Others expand in the most extraordinary way when they find themselves in one. The obligations are different, and the relations between the people are changed. There's one small revelation in *I Want It Now* when there's a pub scene right at the end. It concerns Lord Baldock, whom we've thought of as a very stuffy person and one of the rich up to now. In the pub, it's noted, he seems to be able to find his way to the bar with no trouble at all. Again, a very small, mini-revelation about him, but perhaps the reader feels: Well, we would have liked to have known a bit more about him, as seen in a pub setting.

INTERVIEWER

Does drink play any part in your creative life?

AMIS

Well, it may play an adverse part . . . .

INTERVIEWER

Presumably you can't write when you've drunk too much?

AMIS

No, there comes a fairly early point when the stimulating effect turns into an effect that produces disorder and incoherence. But I find writing very nervous work. I'm always in a dither when starting a novel—that's the worst time. It's like going to the dentist, because you do make a kind of appointment with yourself. And this is one of the things I've learnt to recognize more and more with experience: that you realize it's got to be . . . next week. Not today—but if you don't sit down by the end of next week, it'll go off the boil slightly. Well, it can't be next Wednesday, because somebody from *The Paris Review* is coming to interview you, so it had better be Thursday. And then, quaking, you sit down at the typewriter. And that's when a glass of Scotch can be very useful as a sort of artistic icebreaker . . . artificial infusion of a little bit of confidence which is necessary in order to begin at all. And

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then each day's sitting down is still rather tense, though the tension goes away as the novel progresses, and when the end is even distantly in sight, the strain becomes small, though it's always there. So alcohol in moderate amounts and at a fairly leisurely speed is valuable to me—at least I think so. It could be that I could have written better without it . . . but it could also be true that I'd have written far less without it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a daily routine?

AMIS

Yes. I don't get up very early. I linger over breakfast reading the papers, telling myself hypocritically that I've got to keep up with what's going on, but really staving off the dreadful time when I have to go to the typewriter. That's probably about ten-thirty, still in pyjamas and dressing gown. And the agreement I have with myself is that I can stop whenever I like and go and shave and shower and so on. In practice, it's not till about one or one-fifteen that I do that—I usually try and time it with some music on the radio. Then I emerge, and nicotine and alcohol are produced. I work on until about two or two-fifteen, have lunch, then if there's urgency about, I have to write in the afternoon, which I really hate doing—I really dislike afternoons, whatever's happening. But then the agreement is that it doesn't matter how little gets done in the afternoon. And later on, with luck, a cup of tea turns up, and then it's only a question of drinking more cups of tea until the bar opens at six o'clock and one can get into second gear. I go on until about eight-thirty and I always hate stopping. It's not a question of being carried away by one's creative afflatus, but saying "Oh dear, next time I do this I shall be feeling tense again."

INTERVIEWER

What are the pitfalls in writing humor?

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AMIS

There's one obvious one: You must never make one character laugh at what another says or does. Dornford Yates' "Berry" novels, which are quite good fun in a sedate sort of way, are ruined by everybody collapsing with merriment whenever Berry shows up. The other pitfall is: You must never offer the reader anything simply *as* funny and nothing more. Make it acceptable as information, comment, narrative, etcetera, so that if the joke flops the reader has still got *something*. Wodehouse understood this perfectly, even better than Shakespeare did.

INTERVIEWER

Do you revise as you go?

AMIS

Yes. A page takes me quite a long time. Two pages a day is good. Three pages is splendid.

INTERVIEWER

Is that foolscap?

AMIS

No, it's quarto more. So it's about a thousand words, probably.

INTERVIEWER

Do you compare notes with your wife?

AMIS

Oh yes, we consult each other all the time. And if neither of us is up against some hideous deadline, we read work in progress to each other at the end of the day. We both find this very valuable. You know: "How should I convey this difficult information? Is it plausible that he should say that?" You can get reassurance, or you can get criticism or other suggestions. But I'm sure reading aloud's awfully important,

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Bell Book & end St Edmund's Where is John III buried, and when?

Prologue 1

full orchestra, reaching
Hubert Anvil's voice rose above the sound of the choir and ~~the orchestra~~ the vertex
~~strings~~ of the loftiest dome in the Old World and the western doors of the longest
nave in Christendom. For this was the Cathedral Basilica of St George at Coverley, the
mother church of all England and of the English Empire overseas. That bright May morn-
ing it was as full as it had ever been in the three centuries since its consecration,
and it could scarcely have held a more distinguished assembly at any time: the young
Portugal
King William V himself; the kings of ~~Catalonia~~, of Naples, of Sweden, of Lithuania and
a dozen other realms; the Dauphin and the Crown Prince of Muscovy; the viceroys of
Brazil, India and New Spain, here after weeks of travelling; the brother of the Emper-
Prince High Emperor Beirut
or of Almaigne; the Christian Delegate of the Sultan-Caliph of Turkey; the incumbent
the Vicars of the Pontiff of Constantinople, twelve and from
Archbishop, Primate of United England, ~~and~~ no fewer than ~~eleven~~ cardinals, ~~as~~ less ~~than~~
pre-eminent more besides
~~extant~~ clergy from all over the Catholic world—these and hundreds ~~of others~~ had con-
Solemn
gregated for the ~~official~~ obsequies of His Most Devout Majesty, King John III of Eng-
land and her Empire.
He had been a good
~~The~~ ~~worthy~~ ~~monarch~~ king, worthy of his title in matters of faith and observances,
mutually-respectful held in tender affection ~~by~~
enjoying ~~excellent~~ relations with both Convocation and the Papal Curia, ~~and~~ ~~loved~~ by
A large number
the people. ~~Many~~ of those attending his Requiem Mass would have been moved as much by
a sense of personal loss as by simple duty or the desire to assist at a great occas-
and
ion. Just as many, perhaps, were put in awe by the size, ~~majesty and~~ richness of the
renowned
setting. Apart from Wren's magnificent dome, the most ~~remarkable~~ of the sights to be
in commemorating of
seen was the vast Turner ceiling ~~commemorating~~ the Holy Victory, the fruit of four and
There was nothing like it anywhere.
a half years' ~~of~~ virtually uninterrupted work. The western window by Gainsborough, be-
mother of Constantine the Great,
ginning to blaze now as the sun caught it, showed the birth of St Helena at Colchest-
still brilliant
er. Along the south wall ran Blake's frescoes depicting ~~the progress of~~ St Augustine's
progress
through England. Holman Hunt's oil painting of the martyrdom of St George was less
tale
celebrated for its merits than for the ~~story~~ of the artist's journey to Palestine ~~with~~
Lope
the ~~intention~~ of securing authenticity for his setting; and one of the latest addition
s, the Ecce Homo mosaic by David Hockney, had attracted downright adverse criticism
only
for its excessively traditionalist, almost archaising style. But ~~nothing but~~ admira-
tion had ever attended--to take a diverse selection--the William Morris spandrels on

A Kingsley Amis manuscript page

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anyway. I think both of us get quite as much from ourselves from these readings as we get from the other person. And I was interested to see that Kipling, whom I've been working on recently, used to read his work aloud to himself, too. And I would guess—he doesn't say so—with much the same objective in mind: to find stylistic weaknesses.

INTERVIEWER

Presumably your wife is an exception to your rule about modern women novelists being generally unreadable?

AMIS

Yes indeed she is. I would have put her on my list of modern novelists I read. If she weren't an exception, I could never have married her—a lot of people fail to see that.

INTERVIEWER

What is it you dislike most about women novelists?

AMIS

Well, I think it's a little unfair to them and to me to say "women novelists" like that.

INTERVIEWER

Some women novelists, then. I think you've disparaged the NW1 syndrome.

AMIS

Yes, the NW1 novel*—I suppose it's a handy term. Well, it's dressed-up autobiography, autobiography in fiction that is what I basically object to, because it's very rare for life to present one with a story, merely a repetitious account of a situation: things getting a little worse—generally a little worse—and sometimes a little better, and conflict seems to be omitted, and there's no sense of purpose on the part of the

* *Amis' description of the environs of an NW1 novel is as follows: "A postal area of (North-west) London inhabited partly by intellectuals, trendies, weedies, fashionable journalists and media-men."*

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characters or the part of the author. I like to feel when beginning a novel that some problem is being presented, some choice is necessary, something's got to be worked to. . . .

INTERVIEWER

The funny way Roy talks in *Girl 20* underlined for me the lengths you go to make dialogue sound authentic. All those "sort of's" and "you know's."

AMIS

Well, dialogue's a very powerful weapon, isn't it? Again, traditionally the novelist has to characterize people quite quickly by the way they talk: their various idioms, whether they talk plainly, or in a flowery style. But I do find dialogue quicker to write than narrative—narrative I always find rather painful. Dialogue is more fun . . . but I always try over the phrases, fooling the reader into believing that this is how people actually talk. In fact, inevitably, it's far more coherent than any actual talk. I don't say I succeed all that often, but when in doubt I will repeat a phrase to myself seven or eight times, trying to put myself in the place of an actor speaking the part. And all these "I mean's" and "sort of's" and "you know's" are important because there are characters who find it difficult to lay their tongues on what they mean the first time, and I think this should be indicated.

INTERVIEWER

I couldn't help liking Roy in spite of everything.

AMIS

Oh, I'm very fond of Roy. Again, one can't write a whole book about someone one doesn't like. It overlaps a great deal with boredom: the novelist can't write about somebody that bores him. And the fact that he won't bore you, I hope, with what he says, makes him, to some extent, sympathetic immediately. One would hate to fall within the circle of Roy's responsibilities—irresponsibility is what the book's really

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about—but one couldn't think of a better chap to have a boozy lunch with.

INTERVIEWER

There's a lot about music in the book. I believe it's very important to you.

AMIS

Yes, I would put music slightly ahead of literature. I think a world without music would be worse than a world without books—I don't know whether a world without literature, exactly. But I've always responded to it in an uneducated sort of way—I've done some half-hearted attempts at semi-self education. And I find it a necessity. I find it—what can one say?—refreshing and uplifting.

INTERVIEWER

Would you have liked to have been a musician?

AMIS

Yes. Of course one always has these fantasies about how if things had been different, what other paths one might have pursued. But music would be the first one I would choose if suddenly set down at the age of twelve. One reason is a sort of personal social one that musicians cannot function on their own—even if they're concert pianists playing a piano recital.

INTERVIEWER

Is this why you like writing for television? The need to work with others?

AMIS

Yes, I think it's probably the main motive. Another motive, of course, is trying to do something you haven't done before. Seeing if you can broaden your talent, which is a thing I've always thought necessary.

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INTERVIEWER

Flexing new muscles?

AMIS

Yes. And the other thing, as you say, is working with others. Of course, if it doesn't go well, it's disastrous, and you say, "Why did I ever leave the typewriter to get involved with these people and have my sovereign wishes frustrated?" But when it goes well, it's very exciting.

INTERVIEWER

What do you like about journalism?

AMIS

Well, I like a task. I like being forced to read a book occasionally. And there's still some very very minor literary critic inside my head, and there's still something of a teacher, too. It's a habit that's hard to get out of. And again, it's a change.

INTERVIEWER

All part of the business of entertaining yourself, as well?

AMIS

Yes. And there are also opportunities for stating some critical point you don't think has been emphasized enough.

INTERVIEWER

I thought your last novel, *Ending Up*, was very bleak.

AMIS

Yes, well no book is the author's last word on any subject or expresses what he feels all the time. So if I were to walk under a bus this afternoon, then *Ending Up* would be my last novel, and people might say, "Well, he ended in a fit of pessimism and gloom." This wouldn't really be so. Each novel can only represent a single mood, a single way of looking at the world, and one feels bleak from time to time, and takes

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a fairly pessimistic view of one's own future and chances. But there are other times when one doesn't, and out of that other books would emerge.

INTERVIEWER

I think you've said it was partly inspired by the communal set-up you have here, with relatives and friends living in?

AMIS

Yes. The starting point is so often: What would happen if. . . ? In this case, "What would it be like if we were all old and all, or some of us, handicapped to some degree?" It was a kind of purposeful exaggeration of what is only slightly present or potentially present in existing circumstances.

INTERVIEWER

Did you know that Mencken had had nominal aphasia when you wrote the book?

AMIS

No. That happened because a friend of mine suffered from this mildly. It's cleared up now, and he's a close enough friend for me to ask him, "Do you mind if I exaggerate this?"—"Not at all," he said, "if you think you can get a laugh out of it." I'm surprised that nobody's done it before.

INTERVIEWER

What are you doing at the moment? Is there any work in progress?

AMIS

Well, you find me at a time when that dreaded Thursday week, or something of the sort, is on the horizon. I've got quite a lot of a book in my head, yes, and this will be a sort of science fiction of the sort where the author proposes some change back in history, and deals with the results of that change. In this case, if the Reformation had never taken

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place. Then make the date 1976, say, when the book will probably come out, and show a different England and a different world.

INTERVIEWER

I gather you're also compiling the *Oxford Book of Light Verse*?

AMIS

Yes, I've done a bit of work on that already. It means that I shall virtually have to read the whole of English poetry in a decreasingly ample length of time, but I'll enjoy that because it's something to do in the afternoon.

INTERVIEWER

Could we just close with a summary of what really motivates you as a novelist?

AMIS

Well, as I've said before, self-entertainment is one thing. Another is feeling—I'm sorry, I can't help sounding pretentious here—feeling that this is what I've been designed to do . . . that I'd be failing in my duty to who knows what if I didn't go on producing writing of certain sorts. I don't feel any particular duty to the public. But a different matter, really, is duty to the reader, which determines not whether you shall write, but *how* you write. I don't think I've ever written anything that is designed purely as a sop to the reader: I don't put in bits of sex to increase sales. But I always bear him in mind, and try to visualize him and watch for any signs of boredom or impatience to flit across the face of this rather shadowy being, the Reader.

(I was busy packing up my gear when Amis said he would like to add an important postscript to his final answer.)

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AMIS

And then of course there's always vanity. You remember that Orwell said, when he was answering his own question, *Why I Write*, that his leading motive was the desire to be thought clever, to be talked about by people he had never met. I don't think he was being arrogant, I think he was being very honest.

—MICHAEL BARBER

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S.J. Sackett

SURVIVAL

There are real tigers in that jungle,
But I walked through it and came out alive.
My skin is tougher now where they clawed me.
Even so, if you have a chance to stay home by the fire,
Take it.

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Two Poems by Mark Vinz

CHARTER LINE

At the first sign of
weariness, there will be
a 15 minute rest stop.
The company has assured
us this is true.

The driver wears sunglasses
and a leather vest.
He never turns around.

No one thinks to ask
if we are behind schedule,
or why outside the windows
trees and wildflowers
are turning black.
No one consults a map.

After the first 24 hours
the road begins to
disappear. This doesn't
seem to worry the passengers.
All tickets have been
paid for in advance.

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KEEPING IN TOUCH

Hello, I'm glad you wrote.
Just think, you are a
marathon runner now.
That's pretty good for
a kid who grew up in a closet
with the vacuum cleaner lint.

By accident your
mother called the other night.
She said she missed you on tv
but still hopes you'll grow
a few kids for her window box.
And yes, the blizzards are superb out here.
And yes, I do have my own parking meter now.
And no, I won't be coming home this year,
although I am bereft to hear your peacock died.

It's getting dark in here again. I've lost
my potted plant. I'll close for now. But
keep the bathtub full, and pass along
my greetings to your favorite charity.

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Jane Kenyon

AT A MOTEL NEAR O'HARE AIRPORT

I sit by the window all morning
watching the planes make final approaches.
Each of them gathers and steadies itself
like a horse clearing a jump.

I look up to see them pass,
so close I can see the rivets
on their bellies, and under their wings,
and at first I feel ashamed,
as if I had looked up a woman's skirt.

How beautiful that one is,
slim-bodied and delicate
as a fox, poised and intent
on stealing a chicken
from a farmyard.

And now a larger one, its
tail shaped like a whale's.
They call it sounding
when a whale dives,
and the tail comes out of the water
and flashes in the light
before going under.

Here comes a 747,
slower than the rest,
phenomenal; like some huge
basketball player
clearing space for himself
under the basket.

How wonderful to be that big
and to fly through the air,
and to make so great a shadow
in the parking lot of a motel.

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Two Poems by Douglas Crase

THE CONTINENT AS THE LETTER M

Think of it starting out this way: in profile
Two almost immediate peaks, but widely opposite,
The basin humming with weather in between
And approaching speech as summary ineffectual
As the oceans beside its feet, their murmuring
Montauk, at Monterey. Think of the central
Organizing mound of it, around which
An alphabet of fir mounts up to fall away
Just at the timberline, the solid crown of it
When seen from cabin windows, imposing crash sites
Seen from stricken planes. Ponderous,
The name of our country is ponderous and brown,
Laborious as a growing mastodon, its own huge shoulders
The only thing it's hanging on. Columbia,
Paumanok, say it, the Alamo—we build
Outward from this middle interior sound
So far until, unsupported,
Our imaginations begin to let us down.
To the soft soil of that consonant we return,
Made Massey-Ferguson fertile and turning over
A train of little *m*'s behind the plow. America:
So many centuries thicken its animal sound,
This mammoth that holds us between its knees,
Maumee, Menominee, Michilimackinac,
Deep, past Appalachian deep
The inarticulate lives in its hold on me.

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OTTO MOSER'S BAR IN CLEVELAND

Dead center: it's one of a thousand capitals
In this abstract territory of ours, its dominant
Structure departing, arriving, as if a terminal
Was the best that anyone could do. There are people
Living here, borderless though at the very edge
Of things, and we understand the public monument was
Meant to suggest "history" instead of commemorating
Openly that the event doesn't seem to have ever
Happened here. Yet things must have happened somehow
Even so: The department store was once an opera house,
Fat trains moved for a hundred years, the river's been
Altered by Republic Steel. Perhaps things only happen
When they stop: the crowd is there sobbing to admit
The somber train, will close around the engine where
It shivers releasing steam. In the photographs
The procession has come to a halt, the draperies
Open to discharge the lush import we were waiting for
And in this ceremony we can indulge ourselves until
The unfailing funeral begins again to overtake
Our lovely country where the streets are emptier
For being so well lit. At night after work we see how
The white people are beginning to disappear, starting out
In their cars to count the impersonal miles they were
Never content to make their own. It's true, the terrible
Body stopped here on its way to a living grave,
Gathered mourning around it as it went and left
For us this bared unbearable heart with the logic
Gone out of it: one of thousands to be built
All alike across the indecipherable land from which
Every road leads home and none is getting there.

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Jonathan Holden

READING LESSON

Confused sentences sweep across
the windshield. Then nothing but white
commas exploding out of the night's
bull's-eye. The wipers row on and
on, peeling down the pages one
by one, trying to make some sense
out of the road. At 7000 ft.
it's one white blank, the only print
some blurred annotations that a jeep
made here half an hour ago.
You have to pause, reread,
touch the brake pedal and judge.
Are you licking slush or did you
reach raw dirt, a hint of comfort,
the smell of hot cocoa in the snow?
Will that faint scent last up
this coming switchback or peter out,
your tires skim, begin losing
comprehension, not go anywhere,
the whole car go blind and lose
its place, turn against us, hiss,
drag us toward the ditch?
You scan the page, suddenly
remember: this stuff is dry
as the ashes of old stars.
You're reading for your life.
Your tread is getting the gist
of it, thumbing through the snow,
ripping page after blank page out
behind you and scrambling them up.
Slithering, you cram the gist of it
until the top and then forget.

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Gene Frumkin

TODAY'S LESSON

Today's lesson: a black river
which began in the northeast corner
of Utah struggled downward
through the Rockies into Colorado
concluded as an ink drawing
at my doorstep in Albuquerque

The drawing: a single wiry line
woven into a tumbleweed:
the history of this black river
A gift brought to me
by a whisper in the weather
a black river wrapped around itself

It has no name but what I choose
to discover Its origin is the need
to learn today's lesson Definitely
it exists, within a reason
humanly structured I am ready
to decipher, define to describe

its motion from source to deliverance
I am ready to despair Why this?
Why not, say, a cloudburst of wheat
to stuff my cellar's mooneyed bonesacks?
Today's lesson: the black river
is crumpled up by the teacher

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Florence Cassen

from POSITION PAPERS

Drawing paper down from the cupboard sky
goes in at the top scribble scrabble
green line grass for the bottom filling
the space between with me, mother, V birds.
I outline orange trees. I like them.

"Sky is not a bandage across the top"
says mother, "your birds are much too big
silly dear, nor have I ever ever seen
lollipop trees such as these anywheres.
Why not start over?"

Pressing hard the blackest crayon
first I cross me out over and over
then spoil the page with downpouring x's
and thick spirals of house chimney smoke:
I crumple the whole thing up and stamp on it.

At 30 I take this new manila paper mother
and writing on it I construct it into a cudgel
I smash you over the head with it.

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Conversation

Vicki Lindner

Has he come to say goodbye? I begin to wonder how he will say it as I ring the downstairs buzzer to let him in and throw the rod of the police lock, listening to his footsteps drag him up the stairs—unclear, indefinite thumps, muffled by a sliding sound as his shoes lag a little behind his forward momentum. Each step is followed by almost a second of silence before the sound of the next. In a moment the top of his head appears on the landing and a moment after that the upturned glint of his glasses is visible in the gloomy hallway. I stand behind the police lock, leaving the narrow opening of the door vacant so he can squeeze by. His body brushes mine awkwardly as he enters and automatically I pull back. His eyes swivel a little behind their heavy glass shields and recognize my face. He nods. "Hi," he says.

Over his right shoulder hangs the same damp yellow towel he always brings when he plans to ask if he can use my shower. He stands uncertainly in the center of the small room and squints around it as if to make sure he has reached the place

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he set out for. Giving me another perfunctory nod, he plods the length of the room once, then plods back again, pausing halfway to stare fixedly at the orange couch, obviously deciding whether he should sit down. Little fragments of conversation, unconnected and without logic, sputter in the invisible region which toys with sounds before making them audible in the mouth. Finally I decide what to say; I notice my hands are cold and sweaty.

"Want some orange juice?" I jog the words a little, forcing their tonalities to rise and fall, trying to put some dynamism in the slack, silent atmosphere.

He sits leaning forward on the couch, his neck bent in a way that causes his long, grease-streaked hair to flop onto the lenses of his glasses. The heel of his hand rests on his narrow forehead, supporting it, and his fingers separate the hair into strands and push it back. A few seconds later he answers. "No thanks." I walk across the room, conscious of the exact way my body is moving, and sit on the straight-backed wicker chair. To take up time I push the fruit bowl on the table to one side and unnecessarily brush some crumbs into my hand, then drop them on the floor. Should I wait for him to say something or think up something to say myself in the event he doesn't say anything at all? I intend something just a little clever or slightly ironic, a sharp, precise statement that will reveal the exact significance of his departure to me, and perhaps to him as well. Something that will—and this is most important—lead to a quick paced discussion of places, modes of foreign transportation, currency, anything. But such a statement, if I could manage to think of it, might be far too obvious a ploy to start a conversation, even if it ultimately succeeded in giving our talk the kind of depth he would acknowledge. I reconsider. It would be better to make the same kind of remark I always make when he visits and wait to discuss his journey until he brings it up himself. Some gossip would be appropriate, but risky; he responds indifferently to gossip and often snorts and remains silent at the very idea of such trivia. I give it up and let my mind wander, fingering my scalp, until I notice that we're

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both sitting there with our hands moving through our hair, saying nothing.

My body is on the verge of trembling, despite my extreme efforts to seem as nonchalant and relaxed as if we were just too comfortable with each other to feel the need for conversation. He leaves the couch with a sudden upward lurch and plods to the refrigerator. He opens the door and gazes absently at the dish drainer before removing a glass from it. He pours some milk out of a container, smudging a few drops he has spilled on the floor with his shoe. Holding the glass loosely in his right hand, he walks the length of the room once, then halfway back, looks at the couch, then turning himself around plunges back down on it in a way which makes it squeak and crack.

"Well!" I say briskly, my face glaring with forced animation, hoping that in my simple-minded exclamation he would find some of the excitement and expectancy I'd tried to put there. Excitement over what? His departure, from *my* point of view, I suppose.

He responds by glancing up at me from under his hair and staring nearsightedly at me in a way I take to mean, 'What was all that about?' I know I'm being superficial. For the countless time I enviously acknowledge the extreme sensitivity which dominates the expression of his thin, chapped, compressed lips, the liverish color of which blurs into the blotched areas around them.

"When do you leave?" I ask, reproaching myself simultaneously for another totally ordinary, monosyllabic question.

"Next week," he says. So. Perhaps it's not a farewell visit and he wants to take a shower and leave, like always.

"Well," I say, kicking myself for saying it again the moment it's out of my mouth, but relieved at the same time at the one-syllable time span for thinking of what to say next. I jam in the rest of the sentence as quickly as possible, as if I had always known what it was going to be. "How long will you be gone?" A routine question like this isn't worth much to him.

It takes a few seconds for him to answer, during which time I restrain myself from making some impatient gesture with my

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hand or foot. In those few seconds he is clearly not thinking of the answer he will make, but of something else altogether—a peculiarly individual image or abstraction. He always pauses, sometimes for as long as thirty seconds, in the middle of his sentences and between them. Once he even told me that he didn't believe in filling mental blanks with the usual "ums" and "wells" and "you knows." This gives him a decided advantage over me, always throwing out random, embarrassed sounds in the middle of meaningful silences. In this haphazard, aimless conversation his pauses make little difference, but in the middle of a rare, intense discussion, they annoy me as a flickering light does, and I constantly feel my stomach filling up with a nervous energy, as if I could physically transmit enough charge to his brain to help it complete the circuit. He finally answers my question. "I'm sure I won't be in any hurry to get back to New York."

"Well, I can't blame you for that," I reply, conscious again of the groping "well," and the sanctimonious tone of a consoling schoolmistress in my voice.

Turning his thick glasses away, he shuffles over to the magazine rack and plows out a dog-eared copy of *The Village Voice*. "Hey," he says, swiveling his vision toward me again, "mind if I use your bathroom?"

"Oh no," I reply much too hastily, "not at all." And again too awkwardly and hastily, "Do you want to take a shower?"

"Nope," he says, "not today." I catch myself wondering, without any real right to, what in the world he brought the towel for then. Perhaps he had considered taking a shower and abandoned the idea. He heads for the bathroom which is at the end of a short, dusty hall. It takes him a moment to reach the kitchen on the way; his attention to walking is diverted by the serious nature of his thoughts. He stops by the stove and turns halfway toward me, a small, sensitive smile touching the corners of his lips. "My biggest problem," he says, "is that I can't take a shit without something to read."

He stays in there, rustling from time to time, for ages. I pretend to occupy myself by sponging off a few breakfast

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dishes while I rack my brain for appropriate conversation. I attempt to first construct a basic rhythm of sounds to beat a comfortable rapid pace before I fill them out with the meaning of words. But the rhythm inexplicably becomes the formulas my modern dance teacher chants at the beginning of each class: *arms up*, one and two and three and four, *feet together*, and one and two and three and four, now rest your backs, eight-little-bounces, and one and two and three and four and five and six, feet *apart* and one . . .

YEARS AGO: My chatter and hers, vivid rapid fire, almost always took place in his presence because they were in love. The three of us were friends, or so others thought, but he only tolerated the heat of our meaningless remarks for her sake, because she and I were friends. It is impossible to reproduce the context of our conversation, but in the abstract it consisted of running dashes of sarcasm with interjections of shrieks and sudden ear-shattering bursts of rash hee-haws. After fifteen minutes of pretending an aloof indifference to whatever we were saying he would become unhinged and sit shaking his head furiously from side to side, rubbing his hands wildly through his hair and snorting like a dog that had eaten too much grass. He would assuage his fury by making a pointed remark designed to reveal our superficiality and place most of the blame for it on me. Then we would take great delight in continuing the conversation, completing our destruction of his sensitivities and watch him squirm and paw with well-earned anxiety. He seldom said anything for my personal benefit, but his long, cross silences, sudden spasms of irritation, were clearly designed to remind me that I was a hapless virgin, frozen in a banality which was my only recourse. Whenever he and I found ourselves alone while she was elsewhere for a moment, we sometimes struggled to create the image others had of us—that we were fine friends. At those times it almost seemed as if we were, and our conversation progressed with reasonable speed and enough depth to keep him sitting calmly in his chair. But on other occasions, which I considered more

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accurate representations of the state of our relationship, he would scarcely pretend to talk to me, give me a momentary scornful glance which glinted from the heavy panes of his glasses, and then withdraw totally behind them.

One time the three of us were sitting in the dingy German bar near the college. The two of them were rubbing themselves together when suddenly there was a definite ignition. She shoved the table back from her lap and immediately became violently undone in the ladies room, flagging her messy black hair around the room and weeping in staccato shrieks, clumsily blowing her nose in toilet paper. I patted her heavily on the shoulder, a dry gesture, but she knew how difficult it was for me to make physical offerings to anyone and understood its significance. Finally, not knowing how to console her, I returned to the table, feeling this tragedy, the like of which had never happened to me, in the form of a nervous electricity in my stomach. He was still sitting where we'd left him, crying in loud gulps (not unusual enough in his case to be really shocking). I was speechless, for once, but my mind was groping in a way I was sure created physical movements in my face, for something appropriate to say. I tried to look at him with what I hoped was a sensitive expression, but he never glanced up at me, not once, from his drink.

After a time he returns to the living room from the bathroom, swivels his head until his eyes manage to focus on my pocketbook which is lying on a chair. He rummages through it savagely until he finds what's left of my Pall Malls, jams one in his mouth and fumbles through his back pockets for a pack of matches. He grabs his childlike brown velour jacket with the elasticized collar and wrists from the chair post and jams his arms into the sleeves. "Gotta be going. I'll drop by before I leave."

"OK," I answer, feeling a shameful sense of relief.

He fingers the doorknob for a moment, then asks me how she is. I know all the things I could have said about her and the intense way in which he would have replied and wish he'd

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asked the question earlier. But his hand is on the doorknob now. "Fine. uh. She seems to like teaching. You know. Still seeing the Yoruba tribesman. Fine."

SIX MONTHS LATER: One day I return from work and find him crouched on the downstairs stoop, waiting for me. I haven't expected to see him again somehow. We embrace awkwardly; my cheek scrapes his hair and his lips stick to my neck for a second. We enter the apartment. He squeezes through the opening the police lock makes for him. I put down my load of groceries and invite him for dinner, feeling ashamed at how little I'm looking forward to waiting for him to put his magazine aside and shuffle over to the table where the food has been deposited, shove it around on his plate and finally stub out his half-lit cigarette in the remains—even after all this time.

He has already begun to pace back and forth on the rug. "Well, how was it?" I ask, gratified by my amazing lack of hesitation.

When he reaches the end of the rug near the window for the third time, he answers. "It was great until I got to Turkey."

Through a great effort of will I prevent myself from saying, "And then, and then?" during the long pause that follows.

Slowly he winds up his energy and haltingly tells a few anecdotes: The official exchange rate for American currency was topped by any hustler on the streets of Istanbul; his wallet was robbed in the bazaar; the girl he was traveling with went back to the West Coast to her boyfriend who turned out to be a fag; he caught a cold which became pneumonia and ended up in the cancer ward of an Athens hospital. He stops talking then and continues to trudge back and forth. Since I had prepared myself for one of his rare, lengthy monologues, his sudden halt leaves me groping for an appropriate comment. "And then?" I ask after all.

He shrugs, pauses a moment in the middle of the room and says, "Oh, I don't . . . " I see that there is definitely something wrong with him. The pauses in his conversation erect

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material structures in his face, which violent palpitations tear at until he can quiet them by changing them into words. His hand rakes his hair with the speed of a power mower. I offer him a cigarette which he refuses. He doesn't drink or smoke anymore, he says, which in him appears to be more of a temporary insanity than an improvement in health practices. I feel obligated to try and discover what's troubling him in a competent, sensitive fashion, but against my own will I change the tone of the conversation with a confident air, and with a feeling I recognize as pure viciousness, find myself gossiping. Our mutual friend in Athens, I ask, what does he think of his life style?

He answers this question first with a flurry of pounding, tearing and mowing, then raps out the words, harsh, critical and fast. "He bored me to death and I think his life style is full of shit. Does that satisfy you?"

He has punished me and I laugh a little. It was a foolish question. But I am in no mood to let him get the best of me, and I respond with an anecdote of my visit to this same friend the previous summer. He barely listens, gazing alternately at the ceiling and the wall, although I bring it off in a relatively light, witty manner. After my final sentence we are both dejected and sit in silence. "I'm not in very good shape," he adds, as if we had been discussing him right along. This is what we've both consciously been waiting for—perhaps always—and oddly I feel a sudden surge of strength in my approach to him.

"Oh," I answer. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know," he finally replies. "Everything."

I watch him carefully. He looks like he ought to be sweating profusely. "I don't suppose you'll be wanting any dinner?" I ask. He doesn't answer. I go into the kitchen and get the chopped chuck out of the refrigerator anyway. He has put his head in his hands in a classic attitude of despair. I drop a glass and curse, then rummage awkwardly around in the kitchen closet for the electric broom. He comes into the kitchen and moves up into my face. I involuntarily start back and turn off

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the broom, trying to balance its handle against the slippery door of the oven. His skin is gray, covered with painful blotches. His body smells acrid and his breath indicates that he's been vomiting. I force myself to stop fumbling with the broom and look straight at him.

He grabs my hands with both of his, which are ice cold. I have the feeling that my eyes have popped wide open and are staring at him uncontrollably. He begins to cry, high, wailing sobs. "I'm so scared." His voice catches in his throat and then gurgles out again. "I'm so scared."

"Take it easy, what's wrong, what's the matter?" I ask all at once, like a foreign language tape-recording. I know I am liberated from the awkwardness of words; it won't matter what I say, but I am ashamed to feel myself fighting the impulse to wrench my hands out of his cold clutch. He drops my hands and flings his head and the upper part of his body against the refrigerator door. "I don't know. It's all getting away from me. I'm mainly just scared. Of death. Of everything."

I touch his shoulder, observing my hand as it reaches out and rests there. "Just let me talk," he begs, although I haven't interrupted. "Just let me talk." But he can't seem to manage articulate phrases; he clutches my arm, still attached to his shoulder, and primitive, open-throated howls struggle from his chest.

I try to recall every applicable psychoanalytical concept I have ever read, but my mind is an obstinate blank. "I wish I could think of something to say that would make you feel better." I try to keep my eyes soft and looking into his.

"Don't say anything, just let me talk." He reaches under his glasses and wipes his eyes.

Nervously I turn to the meat and try to rip off the plastic wrapping with my fingernails, leaving his collapsed face fastened on my back. "I don't know," I say. "Everyone feels a bit unhinged when they get back. It's something about having had everything and nothing go on while you were gone."

"I'm so scared," he repeats quickly, before he can cry again. "Worst of all, I think maybe the reason I'm putting on this

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awful show is to make sure you still like me, that you're still my friend. It might all be a big act. I might be feeling this way now just to make sure that someone cared that I was gone."

I turn half my shrinking face toward his twitching lips. "Well of course I cared," I say automatically. "I missed you."

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Vali

A Portfolio

Gerard Malanga

Vali Myers, the artist whose diary pages, drawings and paintings follow, does her work shut in a cage which has been set inside her little home in the hills behind the Italian resort town of Positano. The cage is large enough for Vali to live in along with a live fox. She is not a prisoner. The cage is to her what a burrow would be to an animal, an iron lacework protection against the outside. She speaks of it as a ribcage protecting the heart.

This is the second time Vali's work has appeared in *The Paris Review*. A portfolio of her drawings appeared in #18. Very few of Vali Myers' acquaintances in her early days in Paris, in the late fifties, thought she would survive those times. She had arrived penniless from Australia. She wandered the streets, and sometimes slept in the corners of the Montparnasse cafés. Though she danced in the small boîtes along the rue Dragon, it was for her own pleasure, and for those startled and lucky enough to see her move her body—faded jeans and a man's shirt tucked in at the waist—in the small

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floor space cleared for her. She loved to dance with the Senegalese soldiers at the Rose Rouge and in the street afterwards they got into fist-fights over her. She had no means of support; she carried all her belongings—including an odd piece of fox fur with two button eyes at one end which was a talisman she called "Feeley"—in a wire cage shaped like a bird-cage . . . along with her eye makeup and face powder, a volume of poetry by Thomas Chatterton, the young Irish poet whose act of suicide (at seventeen) Vali often talked of emulating. She wanted to take arsenic (as he did) lying on a bed, and she saw herself collapsing in the same romantic pose painted of the dead poet by the pre-Raphaelite Henry Wallis—an arm dangling, eyes peacefully closed in a gentle face framed by orange hair (the same shade as hers).

It may have been the drawings, and later the painting, which provided a reason not to. In Paris, Vali had some art materials among her belongings. She worked on the drawings at the café tables . . . touching a fine-nibbed pen to little napkin-sized pieces of paper. She invariably drew representations of herself . . . usually lying on a bed, sleeping perhaps, with owls perched on the headstands and goodluck stars sketched with a miniaturist's skill on the girl's bare feet. Vali refused to sell these drawings; they were props as important to her as the red piece of fur she called Feeley.

In the sixties, aware that the French authorities suspected her of being involved in a smuggling ring, Vali left France and settled in Italy with her husband, Rudi. They live in a small brightly painted home with dozens of pets—ducks, chickens, goats, a fox named Foxy (the real-life manifestation of Feeley) and especially dogs, which have numbered over thirty.

She buries the dogs when they die and then digs up their bones years later. "The bones are clean and beautiful—Nature's beautiful like that."

"How many bones do you have?"

"Piles. The little house, all red and gold, and inside are all those lovely bones."

She has the names of the favorites of her deceased dogs tattooed on her feet ("I dedicate my feet to my dogs"). Her left hand "belongs" (as she puts it) to Foxy, to whatever important events in his life can be commemorated with a tattoo, and her right hand belongs to Bishli, her red goat who died, and whose white skull sits in the cage inside the house.

A recent resident in the little commune is a young man, Giani, scarcely more than a boy, who arrived one day from an Etruscan village of ancient ruins. Vali says of him, "He is very pure." The two do erotic dances in the yard among the roosters. He shows her two copulating frogs. He has a small tattoo on his forehead—it represents the marks of a fox's paw—and another, a very thin one, which defines the cleft of his lower lip. Vali says he has two very beautiful designs on his wrists to commemorate his dog, Flora.

Sometimes Vali and Giani lie on the bed and discuss suicide. There is a Beretta in the house.

"Giani lies next to me and we talk about taking a powder—using the Beretta. He said to me, 'Oh, but it's all rusted up, that thing'."

' "Oh, we cleaned it up', I told him, 'Oh yes, love, you bet'."

But life is better. The Italian authorities, after years of badgering, have begun to accept the presence of this strange girl in their hills. She works long hours in her cage. Her recent paintings have become more complex; the symbols have increased; the artifacts of her life (her diaries, pottery, quills, skulls, whales, the fox, an opium set) are tucked away in every cranny of the

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painting surface. Her work has begun to attract attention in Europe—a show in Amsterdam, the commissioning of posters, an interest shown by collectors. A show is planned in the U.S. On occasion Vali comes to New York—an apparition in the lobby of the Chelsea Hotel where she stays.

If she was an astonishing sight in Paris in her early twenties—with the black circles of kohl around her eyes, her face corpse-white, the great crop of orange hair—she presents an equally eye-catching appearance today . . . long, flowing gypsy robes, her neck hung heavy with necklaces, amulets, and beads . . . and now she has embellished her face with the delicate tracery of tattoos—a lyre-shaped design around the mouth, and stars on her cheek bones.

She does not stay in New York long. She is soon gone—back to her hills and the ruckus of the dog packs, and the cage where her fox waits. He sleeps in the bed next to her at night. "He buries his chicken bones in my hair."

—G.A.P.

Lady and Hare

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Moby Dick

Wu Shu

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Death in Port Jackson Hotel

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Jezebel

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Queen of Thorns

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Tarantata

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Rose Starling

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A sketch for a painting in progress

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Doom Moon

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Puttana

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July 72.
Oh lightning and rain over the sea and erosion in the mountains
Thursday 13
Balachus, the little dog drying in the table amongst the sucking babies of his mother, Suzy
Simon from Amsterdam came today, after travelling in Sicily. We did Tarot cards and I got Past — Temperance, Present — Strength, Future — Sun.
Simon had a postcard of a little Sicilian girl embalmed, called Rosalia Lombardo 1918-1920 in Palermo
Temperance — man with 2 bowls pouring one to the other — ebb and flow. Strength — woman with a lion? Sun — boy and girl on a horse, sunflowers.

pages from Vali's diary

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Between Two Walls

Asher / Straus

Five Propositions

1. A wall. Once, the wall was white; now it's an ugly yellow . . . the color of dried urine, old newspaper or faded hopes-and-longings. (Brings to mind the principle that beauty is unstable: while ugliness endures: time only enhances it.) It appears to be made of stucco: nothing else crumbles so easily, and in such a random way. Now the wall is a map, riddled or swarming with continents, oceans and so on . . . a guide to nothing but itself, or to another universe or anti-universe that awaits ours in the deepest shadow of geological time. Or it might be the map of an

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uncharted, say, subterranean aspect of the city. Or the city is neither more nor less than a map of this unknown wall, which we've discovered by chance . . . like the ruins of a temple in the jungle.

2. A porch, from which the wall can be or can't help being seen. The porch is quite broad, like a dock anchored in the river of everyday life, everyday death. It has an air of solidity. The beams that support the roof are massive, the railing is thick. The boards are grey: despite their chips and peeling they make a flat plane of color totally lacking in tonal variation. All the planes are so flat, so neutral, so free of disturbing or anecdotal characteristics, that, over a period of years, one could come to regard it as a large sheet of cream-colored, coarse-textured paper in a writing tablet or sketch pad. If, toward two of the three edges, it's striped with 8 or 14 bars of sunlight, the stripes are so uniform, so unwavering, rotating imperceptibly like the hands of a clock, that they leave no intellectual or psychological residue.
3. Someone sitting on such a porch: say an old woman who, even in summer, wears a faded orange-green plaid overcoat and grey wool toque. Staring at the wall or reading a book. One surrounds oneself with fiction as a matter of course.
4. A detective novel, that opens with a

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conventional sentence like this: "The detective is following a suspect."

5. An author, either of the detective novel proposed in number 4, possibly being read by the old woman proposed in number 3, or an author of fictions that lie approximately halfway between detective fiction and the durable ugliness of yellowed walls.

* * *

A Walk on the Open Moors

The detective is following a suspect. He's investigating the usual brutal murder of a woman by a man in whom all sorts of commonplace masculine habits-and-preoccupations appear in unusual concentration.

Or he isn't following anyone at all. He's simply on his way home from work. The sergeant, who may be after his job, whose obsequiousness only underscores the subtlety of his efforts to trip his superior up at every turn, is driving. This is a matter of habit, equally unpleasant for driver and passenger, the layers of deception and play-acting are so manifold. This time two other officers are in the back seat and a third man . . . a pompous-and-important-looking stranger with a brown, swollen, schoolboy's briefcase or thin, black, leather-handled portfolio in his lap . . . is wedged between the detective and the driver. The sergeant is wearing a tweed cap. With his handlebar moustache, it gives him an odd, turn-of-the-century air.

Space is turning blue-violet with approaching night . . . as if they're driving steadily away from a pale and lucid daylight that continues to shine behind them, while ahead lies nothing but darkness. . . . Just now they're making their way through the twilight region, the shredded fringe of the city, near the docks or in the factory district, region of shabby and monu-

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mental cubes, battleship grey or mocha-yellow, and dark, narrow crevices, each with its dwindling rectilinear vista of nothing but itself, of lines, planes and compressed spaces, a hint of slightly more spacious vacancy in the infinite middle distance. Soon there'll be a turning, round a small, paved-over park where, during the day, children play at soldier-and-enemy and, at night, real murders are committed twice weekly, then a short length of highway that climbs a straight diagonal from sidewalk to rooftop toward a bridge of bluegrey steel x's or follows a shallow grade downward into a tunnel, at once black and fluorescent.

The car turns into a street that looks tremendously familiar, too familiar in fact to merely be a street that one drives along every day of one's life. In that case, the word "familiar" would be out of place. A street one knows, without knowing how. . . .

The dark street is lined with small, dreary storefronts. God alone knows what they sell, or if they sell anything. Everything is a front for something else, as if every human and material phenomenon led, ultimately, along circuitous ways to the same hidden source. . . .

The detective goes stiff with surprise. He's seen someone step out of the shadows and, glancing behind him, break into a run, or something between a run and a fast walk. It seems to him he's seen the man before, interviewed him in his office, as a suspect in the case of the murdered woman. He orders the driver to pull up: almost before the car comes to a halt he's on the dark sidewalk, pointing after the retreating figure with his left arm. . . . The others have also piled out and stare in the direction indicated by the detective's outstretched arm-and-finger. Half out of the car or standing awkwardly on the sidewalk, they gaze intently, yet with a certain confusion . . . as if there's nothing of interest to be seen at all. They're simply humoring the chief, each thinking to himself that it's time the old man retired. Of course, there's a natural explanation for the street's vacancy. The man's simply turned the corner, in order to elude his pursuers. Nothing could be more convenient

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than the subway station half-a-block away.

The detective realizes this in a twinkling. "Don't worry about me," he says to the others. "I'll take the train . . . it's a straight ride, the change'll do me good . . ." or something in that vein. . . .

* * *

By the time he's turned the corner, glanced hurriedly into the doorways of a dozen dreary storefronts, into the dark interior of a bar, bounded down the subway stairs, bought a token from the sluggish or hostile clerk, pushed through the thick, reluctant turnstile, and made his way to the platform, nearly five minutes have elapsed. They're contained in the short space between the fourth period after the word "vein" and the straight line that begins the letter B.

In one respect he's fortunate. It's a local station, there are only two platforms, one for the downtown trains, another for the uptown. The two platforms, grey-black with a million years of dirt, face each other across the rusty pit of the tracks, the third rails, the green girders. Because the station is near the river (as soon as the train leaves the station it enters an arch of charcoal-brown space) the ceiling is curved to support the extra weight and stress of the water-and-sewage that slides above it, day-and-night, under a dozen or so dark or illuminated bridges and their additional weight of cars in single or double file, each with its one, two, three, five, or seven passengers, inching toward one exit or another, toward highways and streets that slip into dark furrows in the surface of the mountain of coal blackness and shabby lights. . . . The curve of the station's roof, painted the same dark sea green as the girders, holds up the river, perhaps the entire city, like the bowed back of Atlas, at least as he appears in countless popular artistic and commercial renderings; like everything else, it's been placed here without knowing why, enduring an unendurable burden of life, time, senseless and purposeful motions in the atmosphere.

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As the detective steps onto the downtown platform he perceives a slight vibration, accompanied by a diffuse rumbling. Perhaps a train has just pulled out. In that case, he's out of luck, the suspect's been swept away by chance, as by a wave, at this moment he's somewhere in the darkness under the city, like a drowned body in the East River.

On the other hand, a train may be approaching. In that case the suspect must still be on the platform.

At this point, any number of things are possible.

The rumbling gradually dies away, the square molecules, tiles, and stones of the station settle back into a filthy, miserable silence, a silence composed of a steady flow of murmurs and complaints, like the silence in an underground water or sewage pipe, and it becomes obvious that the suspect has succeeded in escaping: "like a rat in a sewer." In this case, the detective waits impatiently, or angrily, for the next train and gets on without the slightest interest in his fellow passengers. In all the world, at this moment, there's only one thing that interests him. This singleminded condition brings to mind a few lines spoken by an unstable, charming-but-dependent Henry Fonda to level-headed-career-woman Joan Crawford in an early Preminger movie whose title exists not in the narrow, subjective world of the visible-and-the-remembered, but in the far larger mirror-world of the invisible-and-the-forgotten, world of history and objective matter: "There's nothing but you and me. We're alive. The rest of the world is dead."

Or: exactly at the moment and precisely to the extent that the rumbling of the departing train dies away the rumbling of an approaching train swells and gains in volume. The noise remains on a continuous level, a rusty spring that stretches and vibrates uniformly to left and right, so that it fails to indicate direction to the detective on the platform. He feels in his bones that the suspect's gotten away, but, as the situation is so poorly defined, he has to act as if there's still a chance, remaining on the alert. He makes an effort to take a rapid inventory of the others who are temporarily imprisoned on the platform, on the

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edge of the muddy ditch, with its two rust-coated tracks leading into the dark tunnel. When the train arrives, in a matter of seconds, and he gets on, he keeps his eyes open, something like the train itself, with its unblinking, lidless headlights probing the dense smoke of darkness . . . here-and-there scorched and strangely luminous, carrying traces of burning wood or singed rubber . . . for signals, warnings, clues.

Or: it's clear that no train has pulled out. The rumbling swells distinctly from the left, the direction from which the train must approach. What's more, it won't arrive (perhaps something's held it up, a red signal light or a body on the tracks) for at least 3 minutes, more than enough time to take a good look into the imperfectly closed circles formed by each of the small clusters of fellow-prisoners waiting on the platform. Not one face looks familiar. Altogether, there are 11 people, two groups of three, one of two, and three alone. Of these, seven are black. As none of the suspects is black, that leaves only four. Of the four whites, two are together. Either the suspect is one of the two solitary whites, or he's managed to strike up a conversation with a total stranger, or, by chance, he's bumped into a friend or acquaintance. Yet, even by narrowing the possibilities with these logical subdivisions, the detective isn't able to discover anyone who resembles the man he's certain he saw slip out of the shadows on the excessively familiar street of shabby storefronts. This is more than puzzling, for obvious reasons. If a train hasn't pulled out or pulled in, and the man ran down the subway stairs, then he must be on the platform. Is it possible that he's managed to disguise himself . . . or, more cleverly, that he was wearing a disguise in the street and has now removed it. This is a device that must or ought to be used frequently in thrillers. The detective can only hope the harsher lighting of the train will help him out. This train of thought of course raises the possibility . . . a sort of vast, dark and empty tunnel equal to all the complications and subdivisions of the subway system . . . that the man never entered the subway at all. But,

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when the detective rounded the corner, after a lapse of no more than a few seconds, say 16 or 23, 30 at most, the street, the entire x of crossing streets, was deserted, with the possible exception of an ancient Chinese man, probably a noodle or spice merchant, moving along at a snail's pace, making his way home. . . . On the other hand, there hadn't been time to adequately investigate the doorways, the possibility of an open bar or diner. . . . The letters of a red neon sign linger in the darkness of the detective's memory, something like a warning light in the tunnel. And, beneath it, a large, dark window, possibly with gold lettering in fake turn-of-the-century style. Through it, a hurried view of a woman on a stage, in a red or blue spotlight, bare-breasted, with a minute pink loincloth below. Upright or lying on the platform of polished boards, the woman is performing, no doubt to inaudible music, the usual vigorous pantomime or furious parody of sexual intercourse. Men are sitting on shabby, round-backed wooden chairs quite near the stage, tinted by a blue or red penumbra. . . . It seems to the detective that there was a man on the pavement, in a shabby grey suit, watery-eyed and open-mouthed, more-or-less imbecilic, staring through the window, with his face and palms pressed against the glass. . . . But this may be a fabrication, arising from fear of having pursued the wrong avenue. . . .

Or: it's clear that the rumbling comes from the left, the direction from which the train must approach. But there isn't sufficient time to examine the waiting passengers. He simply has to board the train, keep his eyes open and hope for the best. In this case, he doesn't even have the leisure to remember or fabricate the red neon sign, possibly one with the second and last letters missing or blackened, like hopeless gaps in a chain of logic, or to wonder if the suspect might not be sipping a beer or a vermouth cassis in a dreary little bar, possibly under two blue or silver globes revolving each around the other, in front of a tremendous rectangular mirror. There's an impurity in the cheap glass of the mirror, and everything reflected in it is tinted a dusky silverblue . . . the tiers of bottles, the far wall,

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the overhead lights, the scuffed and rutted tables and chairs, the wrinkled men in wrinkled clothes, hoping to pass out and fall to a relatively solid bottom, or wondering if it's possible, some time before the last instant of life, to rise to the surface of lucid consciousness, whatever that might be. . . .

Sooner or later all these possibilities resolve themselves into one event: a train pulls in, everyone climbs on. Or it's possible that things don't resolve themselves so easily, one man seems to change his mind at the last minute, backing off abruptly, as if he's realized he'd been about to get on the wrong train, it would have taken him far out of his way, perhaps hopelessly, like being set on the wrong track from the moment of birth, discovering one's distance from real life when it's much too late, when the architecture of one's life makes it impossible to change in any but a shallow and merely symbolic or cosmetic way. . . . The detective stares after this man in dismay. Can it be that the suspect's eluded him with such a simple and obvious trick?

One man remains behind, hastily wrapping up his face in blue muffler or grey-black overcoat collar. He stands there, instead of heading for the exit, because he's innocent or because he wants to appear innocent. From a police standpoint, every action can be looked at in two ways: the suspect does and says things just like this, without a thought, or everything he says and does is synthetic, an approximation of the suspect's idea of innocence and normalcy.

Suspicion makes a puzzle of everything.

Or no one remains behind. The platform is empty. Or a man is standing there all right, but he's only just pushed through the turnstile; out of breath, he stares after the last, waddling car in frustration.

If this is the case, the detective gazes back at him with equal intensity and frustration, trying to gauge the sincerity of the man's unhappiness. It's a little like being granted a vision of himself . . . in the event that he hadn't boarded an incoming train, but, instead, had been forced to watch the retreat into the arch of brown-black space of a train that was just pulling

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away, a train from which the suspect could glance back, satisfied with his own ingenuity and the favorableness of chance.

* * *

The simplest action is capable of division into endless alternatives. Driving along, on the way from day to night, you accidentally spot one of the suspects in your most complex and demanding case. You get out and, taking a minute to dismiss your driver, give chase. An instant ago things were like a pane of glass. You looked straight through actual life . . . into a vacuous other world. Now you or circumstances have struck the glass with a hammer, and a million forking paths, sharp fragments, webs of logic, of doubt, of doubtful logic, appear where there was nothing. All it takes, it seems, is one question about the nature of things, about the misery of others, for example, or the poverty of one's own existence. Why does one work so hard, holding things up with the bowed back of an Atlas or a subway tunnel, and yet have nothing. . . ? Is there a sort of bank . . . there's something called The World Bank in actuality . . . where all this endless labor is deposited and the tiny or infinite dividends of nothingness and boredom are doled out?

* * *

Now the detective is on the train, say three cars from the rear, in whose wake violent air currents, sucked into the vortex of empty space left behind, carry the thunder and screeching of the wheels toward the dwindling phosphorescence of the station; where someone who's just passed through the reluctant turnstile may be wondering whether the distant rumbling indicates a train that's arriving or departing.

The detective's course of action is, of course, determined entirely by the earlier alternatives. In other words: if he knows for a certainty or strongly suspects that the suspect's escaped on

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another train, he simply takes a seat and falls to dozing, dreaming, or furtively searching the faces of his fellow passengers . . . out of habitual suspicion, boredom, or the discomforting visual confrontation imposed by the facing rows of seats.

If he believes that the suspect is somewhere on the train, in one of the cars, bathed in yellow or white phosphorescence, then he has to act quickly. During the period the train is under the river, the dark arm of water that flows between the industrial shorelines of Manhattan and Brooklyn, he has to make his way through every car, examining the angry, muffled face of every passenger. If he fails to turn up the suspect in that time he'll have to give up, take a seat, fall to dreaming, and so on. And, should he actually succeed in locating someone who just might be congruent with the outlines of the man who slipped out of the shadows, near a garage or freight-loading door of vast proportions, a door of deep forest green with the number 24 hand-lettered sloppily in orange paint, still another lengthy and complex chain of alternatives will spring up.

* * *

The dark walls of the tunnel: now a rounded, unbroken enclosure, now flickering glimpses, through short arcades of square girders, of a second set of tracks, another tube of darkness in which red, green, or yellow-orange lights ought to signal entrances, exits, doubtful alternatives. . . . The dark walls are the color of smoke pouring out the windows of a burning factory.

* * *

Inside the train, the detective makes his way, somewhat unsteadily . . . the shopworn metaphor of a sailor finding his sea legs, particularly a sailor in a submarine, isn't entirely inappropriate, seeing that the train is sealed in by water . . .

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through the shabby fluorescence, material weariness, yellow or white, strangely similar to a prolonged failure of the will, of one car after another. It may seem to him the light smells like dried urine in a public toilet, say the vast and drearily brilliant one on the third floor of the 42 Street Library.

* * *

He finds his man or he doesn't.

* * *

Let's say: he's ruled out everyone and taken a seat. He's in a bad humor. It's incomprehensible. Since he's searching for the suspect, the suspect must be on the train. The logic of this apparently paradoxical statement is unassailable . . . in the light of the alternatives that have led to this point. Yet, he's disappeared. The man on the platform. . . ? The bar with its shabby tables sketched solidly in a blue mirror. . . ? Another, even deeper shadow than the one from which he'd first emerged. . . ? Before long the train will be climbing the shallow grade of the far shore, nearer the surface of life, with its daylight, pavement, telephone poles, wisps of grass, bloody footprints and so on, entering another gloomy station, greygreen with time and everyday misery, and, after that, there can't be any question of turning the man up, the world will have swallowed him once again. . . .

These doubts or worries may or may not plague the detective as he sways in his red leatherette or hard, grey plastic seat, between a round-faced young woman in a silver fox chubby and a young man in a soft blue wool seaman's cap and stained battle coat.

Does he occupy or amuse himself in any way? There are so many possibilities, even excluding the interior world of memory, dreams, the rose-colored theater of the eyelids.

Perhaps, without our knowledge, he has some sort of printed matter stuffed into the righthand pocket of his

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overcoat . . . in the event of just such a vacant or disturbing moment. Possibly it's a tabloid newspaper, filled with the usual pornographic photographs and true-life or fictional tales of sexual exploitation. Or it's a thriller called *The Subway Murder Case*, he opens it and reads the sentence: "The detective is shadowing a suspect, when, at last . . ." and so on. Or it isn't a detective novel, but, on the contrary, a Marxist tract on criminology. In that case he reads something like this:

> Things may not be so random as they seem. One plays a role no matter what . . . in a system as schematic, as manipulated toward rational ends as the plot of a thriller. Therefore: if the suspect fails to turn up . . . after appearing at the exact instant the sergeant's car had rolled onto the too-familiar street . . . then your role is revealed to be one of endless frustration, following false leads, chasing shadows down blind alleys, ending up in the dark. . . . It may be like this: someone has to be pursued, since the world is filled with crimes. On the other hand, those who perpetrate the crimes mustn't be caught, as they hold the reigns of power. One's role in this scheme is to create a thousand false scents, to hound someone or anyone, while the real killers swim in their pools, smoke their cigars, lay their pipelines. . . .

Or, still more unlikely, unavoidable only now that it's begun to crawl into print, is the possibility that he's reading a chapter called "On the Nature of Things" in a scientific text called *Space, Time and Gravitation*, by a scientist named Eddington and published in 1920. . . .

> This is how our theory now stands: We have a world of point-events with their primary interval relations. Out of these an unlimited number of more complicated relations and qualities can be built up mathematically, describing various features of the state of the world. These exist in nature in the same sense as an unlimited number of walks exist on an open moor. But the existence is, as it were, latent unless someone gives a significance to the walk by following it; and in the same

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> way the existence of any one of these qualities of the world only acquires significance above its fellows, if a mind singles it out for recognition.

Or he has no printed matter stuffed into his side pocket and he amuses himself by examining the advertisements. On one of the panels, directly across from him, a bank or private finance company recommends loans for home improvements, such as a new roof, reshingling, electric heating, or for long-desired purchases: a new car, a vacation, a degree, a marriage. . . . A general estimate of the interest rates, the schedule of payment, is offered in the form of a chart; small, dark type against a watermelon background, the color of diluted blood. Perhaps it brings to mind something he's read in connection with the case of the murdered woman. Not necessarily one of the suspects, but someone on the periphery of the case, one of those beings in fact whose sole function seems to be to define the periphery of various spheres of action, had taken out a loan at the moment it appeared, at least to him, that he was about to go under, that is more profoundly than usual. Say a NY-bar-and-racetrack type whose brain is pickled in cheap scotch and shallow, insatiable longings for what amounts to nothing more than a more expensive brand of scotch, say an endless supply of Chivas Regal. Or it's a middleclass husband-and-father who, after 20 or 30 years of futile slavery for some large corporation or other, makes the not-very-energetic moral leap of going into business for himself and loses everything. So he borrowed $3000 from a loan company. He's paid back $1000, yet still owes $2700.

Or he takes in the bank or loan company's charts and figures rapidly and superficially, without being reminded of anything, and turns his attention to a neighboring advertisement, say one for a vast chain of drugstores in the form of a checklist of popular items:

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Antacids
Antidepressants
Adhesive Tape
Antiseptic Baby Oil
Aspirin
Baby Foods
Bandages
Chest Rubs
Cleansing Tissues
Cough Syrups
Deodorants
Disinfectants
Electric Heat Pads
Face Creams
Face Powders
Fever Thermometers
Foot Preparations
Fountain Syringes
Hair Sprays
Hair Tonics
Hand Creams
Hemorrhoidal Suppositories
Home Permanents
Hot Water Bottles
Insecticides
Laxatives
Lipsticks
Mouth Wash
Nail Polish
Nose Drops
Prophylactics
Perfumes
Photo Film
Razor Blades
Rubber Gloves
Rubbing Alcohol
Saccharin
Sanitary Napkins
Shampoos
Shaving Cream
Talcum Powder
Toothbrushes
Tooth Pastes
Toilet Waters
Witch Hazel
Zinc Oxide Ointment

Or the print of the loan company and pharmaceutical advertisements is too small, or the texts are too boring, and the detective's attention wanders to a more lurid, more entertaining image. A man is standing in the center of the poster, his arms ladden with gift-wrapped packages. Cream or scarlet wrappings, blue ribbons, and so on. A woman is kneeling in

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front of him, slightly to his right. One of her stockinged knees touches the blue carpet or parquet floor, while the other leg makes a slightly uptilted right angle behind it. This position hikes up and folds back, as if by careful arrangement, the short skirt of her tasteful blue wool suit, so that the hem makes a diagonal line like this / across her upper thighs, just below the deep shadow concealing or suggesting the sexual cleft. She's looking up with an eager-to-please smile, eyes deep and wide, at the man or at the beautiful packages. It might be an advertisement for anything, perhaps for normal marriage, or for patriarchy itself. The colors are rich and glowing, as if the clothing and the skin-tones have been dyed indelibly with certain assumptions or carefully fostered attitudes: the man's *view of himself, his view of the woman, the woman's view* of the man, her view of herself. The packages at the center of this web of attitudes: held by the man, eyed by the woman. Five hundred, two thousand, two-hundred-and-fifty thousand or more living corpses see this vivid image or static drama in the course of an afternoon. There's one in every car. And a million others along the same lines. Reproductions appear throughout the city, the universe, in every living soul. . . .

Or he doesn't examine the advertisements. He pulls a roll of Bazooka bubble gum from his pocket and finds that only one of the five attached sections of the original bright pink tube is left. He pops the ¾" pink cylinder into his mouth and occupies himself by chewing. The mechanical working of the jaw blots out the visible world, thoughts, memory of the immediate past and apprehension of the immediate future, to an amazing degree . . . as if one had all of time and space, all of reality, at least the reality of one's life, between one's teeth. . . . You grind it up with all your might, diligently, till your muscles ache, till reality is a formless and tasteless gob, a gob that continues to cohere no matter what. . . . If this is what he does, he also may amuse himself by looking at the three-panel comic strip, with its fortune or maxims, wrapped around the pink tube of gum, inside the waxed outer wrapper of blue, white, and red.

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mani nblu einb lack door way woman man in in red green on a purple divan	blac kdoo rway m a n i n b l u e s h o o t s woman man (radi- in in ates red green alarm) on a purple divan	blac kdoo rway punch line man & man in laughter in blue green on a purple divan woman in red

Life until now = fiction until now. One has only to topple life to topple fiction. Or to topple fiction to topple life.

or Fiction, if it's anything, is a methodical technique of bumping into oneself by accident.

or One is or ought to be always troubled by the deliberate opacity of fiction. No matter what, actuality is hidden behind a heavy grill, a subway or sewer grating of words, of false identities, and of the real material of page-and-print.

Or, he's so exhausted, in such a foul mood, knowing that it was a stroke of misfortune, and not of luck, to have "accidentally" crossed the path of one of the suspects, that he doesn't bother to amuse himself in any way. He may simply fall to scrutinizing his thumb. It seems to him ugly and strangely wrinkled, cross-hatched with a million narrow,

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clay-red creases, like a turtle's neck, the skin of the eyelids or of the scrotum. And the fleshy crotch or pad between the thumb and its neighboring finger seems like a remnant of webbing or a hint of old age. . . .

Or he may not be looking at his own thumb at all. It's the thumb of a man across from him, at a diagonal, to the left, like this:

X^1 (man with ugly thumb)

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.
.
.
.
.
.

X (detective)

The thumb is clutching a newspaper. The newspaper is folded back on itself, so that only one sheet, the dimensions of a tabloid, is visible. The sheet is covered with newsprint . . . all of it too small to be legible from the detective's or our position . . . with the exception of a large photograph, which occupies say one third of the page. A woman, naked from the hips up, with waves of dark hair cushioning her face, and tremendous breasts with broad, dark-tinted nipples, is smiling seductively and rather sweetly, with all the pathetic or repulsive näiveté of someone who imagines she's in control of her destiny, that her will is a match for the forces arrayed against her.

Why is she smiling?, the detective may wonder. What can there possibly be to smile about? Is she acting? Does she suppose a picture like that might actually be a stepping stone in some sort of career, as an actress, for example, or as a model? Perhaps she really enjoys it, people are so warped they can enjoy anything, even being beaten with a wrench. . . . Or it

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may be her first time, someone's deceived her with all sorts of tales, a fat accountant from the suburbs who's placed an ad in the classified section of a tabloid promising loads of money for an hour of modeling underwear or something like that. . . . In that case, she's stupid, a real cretin, and that's why she's smiling. Even after the accountant has laid her and dropped a $5 bill in her crotch she'll continue to smile. . . . Or she might be a clever girl, one of those people who get hopelessly tangled in their cleverness, she's lost her job, she's desperate for cash. She goes into it with her eyes open. She's given the matter a lot of thought and decides that posing for a picture like that is no more degrading than anything else, one prostitutes oneself in any case. . . .

It occurs to the detective that there's someone hidden behind the paper. The owner of the ugly thumb. All the time he's been wearing the girl's voluptuous body, her real or synthetically smiling face and luxurious hair, as a disguise.

* * *

He waits patiently.

Eventually, his patience is rewarded.

The man lowers the paper in order to turn the page.

* * *

Never in his life has he seen a face so hideous, so patently evil. Another sentence could be superimposed: Never in his life had he seen a face so commonplace, so hideously normal.

What is there for us to say . . . or for the detective to observe?

The man lowers his newspaper and exposes the hideous face, the bored or greedy countenance of a normal man, perhaps a Wall Street broker, in a more or less unguarded moment, if such a thing is even remotely possible, for a Wall Street broker or any other supremely normal man.

The detective sees something like this:

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The hat: everyday and middleclass. No doubt it has a name: porkpie, snapbrim, fedora. It has a small brim, a deep, soft cleft in the dome, and a small blue feather in the dark band. The color is deep blue, almost black, possibly thick lines of an even deeper, blacker shade cross at regular intervals to make a tasteful, rather obscure plaid.

The overcoat: also tasteful, even elegant. A blend of small blue and black dots of wool, the impression it gives from a distance, even from the facing row of seats, is of a dusky blue, like the twilight that fills New York Harbor . . . through the massive triangles and diamonds of the bridges, above the islands with their heavy freight of institutional brick, their bureaucracies and their prisoners, the weary or wearisome tugs, the vast green-yellow film of oil, the corpses . . . with deep shadows, a world of flawless darkness thinly veiled behind it.

The overcoat separates from belly and crotch, passing in fairly straight, slightly undulating lines over both thighs and onto the red or grey plastic seat, and exposing the material of the suit to the detective's scrutiny.

The jacket and trousers of the suit: an expensive charcoal grey pinstripe. A sharp crease bends at each knee and runs down each shin. The suit has been cut to take in the protruding stomach. Still it wrinkles into dark folds, warping the straight lines of the pinstripe from the globe of the stomach, in tiers, down to the crotch, where the heavy, drooping genitals are grossly outlined, like fruit in a cloth shopping bag.

The shoes: brown, with the hundreds of little perforations, arranged in radiant stars or graceful fleur-de-lis, that businessmen seem to consider a mark of dignity, upper-class good taste, power, or of something else, no one can say what.

The face peers out from all these material attributes of normalcy.

The skin of the face is a pale yet surprisingly livid red.

The ears are more brilliant. One can tell they're capable of turning more brilliant still, an electric, pomegranate red or scarlet.

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The eyes gleam, let's say with nervous lust. They lick at the surface of the hidden pages, getting a taste of the lines a bit further on . . . exactly like a tongue; while the tongue no doubt has certain qualities of ocular scrutiny. . . .

The nose is tremendous, the butterfly nose of a rubber mask or a nose pressed against glass or imprisoned in a nylon stocking: a fleshy right-angle, extremely bony and narrow at the bridge, far broader across the red-veined nostrils. It seems capable of carrying on a life of its own or of representing a whole system of values-and-desires.

The mouth is long and sharp, the flesh of the lips red and slippery like two strips cut from a balloon. Now-and-again it purses as if to whistle, though only a bit of toneless air escapes.

Flashes of sensation make the eyes shine, the nostrils dilate, the lips curl into something like a smile.

Together the features organize themselves into a hideous parody of lust, of a man itching with what can only be called an erotic greed, a capitalism of sensuality. . . . In that case, someone ought to think, not very subtly, but with a certain irony, it isn't an unguarded moment at all. It's simply a Wall Street broker underground. The city above: another, darker city below, like an image in a dirty puddle, say the New York skyline drowned in the East River.

The broker's face changes and remains the same. Infrequently, with obvious reluctance or fierce eagerness, he turns the pages of the newspaper. What is it that keeps him glued to these hidden pages? the detective may wonder. The photograph of the näive or clever woman with tremendous breasts and beautiful hair? Perhaps she's posed for other photographs, in various classical positions . . . and it's these positions, with their chains, garters and so on, he's reluctant to leave behind, if he turns the page she'll be unbound by weakness of memory if nothing else. . . . Or she's trapped in words: the photographs may be illustrations for the text of a true-life story in this vein: A middle-aged G.P. or gynecologist in the middlewest, dapper, with a little moustache, uses his practice as a means of pursuing his sexual deviations. Each

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time a good looking woman, one with a shapely body and not yet melted into wrinkles by age, comes into his office, most often by chance, having picked his name at random from the local telephone directory, he prescribes a course of treatment like this: endless explorations of the genitalia and a long, but strangely inexpensive series of mysterious injections. It seems that it's these strange injections that inevitably lead to the doctor's "downfall." The symptoms they bring on are so peculiar and so pronounced that they attract the attention of others, as well as causing some alarm in the women themselves. Deepening of the voice, abnormal growth of hair, reddening of the skin and rise of body temperature, fantastic and unrelenting increase of the sex drive. In various parts of the midwestern city where the true-life story takes place, bits of dimly remembered images from within the doctor's chambers, more like haltingly told fictions than anything else, begin to transpire into a larger zone of life. Through various channels that bind one zone of organized life to another, these fragmentary and lurid fictions reach the region of officialdom. Police are sent to the doctor's office with a warrant. They turn up concealed photographic equipment, some of extreme sophistication, infrared or something like that, capable of taking pictures in the dark. In file cabinets, photographs of countless women, undressing, as if in private, or on the examining table, with their feet in the metal stirrups and their legs spread, or with the doctor bending over them, and so on. On a cassette tape recorder, a tape with the sound of women's voices in moments of sexual excitation. With this evidence in hand, the police contact various patients and interrogate them. Bit-by-bit, with considerable embarrassment, the women tell the same story. The endless, prolonged internal examinations, the injections of increasing strength, the feeling of lassitude and loss of voluntary motor power, the unnatural sexual stimulation. In a few cases there are uncertain recollections of indecent proposals, forcible entry, prying into sexual histories, the shadowy presence of strange men. . . . Why is it, the police ask, somewhat insinuatingly, that the women

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returned to the doctor's office time after time, or that they failed to report him to the authorities. . . ? Many, it turns out, did terminate treatment as soon as his intentions became clear. Others were too embarrassed to speak of it. A few, the more vigorous and outspoken, registered angry complaints with various agencies, but were brushed off as troublemakers or hysterics, were told to supply physical evidence, or were propositioned by officials over the phone. Several had no explanation at all, beyond a certain doubt as to the reality of what had occurred. This last explanation makes someone or no one wonder if the silence of the women has something to do with the fact that the injections, the stupor, something like the stupor of boredom or of a lifeless object, the manipulation, the sexual exploitation, the boundless lechery and arrogance of the doctor, are so much in harmony with normal life at home, at work, in the world at large, only slightly less or more real, in the manner of dreams or popular fiction. . . .

* * *

How is it that the detective is able to read this hidden text . . . unless he's succeeded in slipping into the man's overcoat, hat, suit, shoes, mask and so on.

And how is it that we're able to see through the detective's eyes, unless. . . .

* * *

In the space indicated by the three asterisks something ought to happen . . . to bring things to a climax, or at least shed some light on the stranger's identity or his role, if any, in the murder of the woman.

* * *

Now is the proper moment for the train to plunge . . . to plunge the train . . . into darkness, the darkness in which

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it's actually swimming. . . . It's the moment toward the end of a thriller when the detective, addressing those gathered in the library of the mansion, sets a trap: one by one he ticks off the suspects, peeling away layers of doubt-&-suspicion as if they were layers of his own identity. At last he's about to name the killer. "The murderer of Margaret Odell, the notorious 'Canary' of Broadway," he says, "is in this room!" Actually he's only succeeded in narrowing the number of suspects down to two or three, he's banking on the murderer's fear and guilt, he'll switch off the lights and try to make his escape in the ensuing noise and confusion. . . . Obviously, the one who steps through the door onto the blue-and-sand-colored oriental rug in the hall, where his assistant is waiting just outside, behind a fern in a magnificent green-and-white vase, or even the one who temporarily gets away, has to be the one who's guilty. Sure enough, the lights are doused, there's a tremendous commotion, the door opens and closes. . . .

The train passes over one of those switches that cause the lights to dim or go out altogether, first in one car, then another, returning to the first as they're sucked out of the second. Anyone who knows the reason for this can supply it. In a few seconds they'll come back on, but, by then, the man should have vanished, the detective will search the 10 or 12 cars in vain. In this case his peculiar behavior . . . this is the second or third time he's walked the length of the train, peering into faces, behind newspapers and magazines, trying desperately to see through the countless red faces that resemble hideous rubber masks . . . arouses the suspicion of the passengers. Someone alerts the motorman or a uniformed patrolman, a message is transmitted to the next station. When the train pulls in, it's the detective who's taken into custody and an amusing or frightening scene ensues, in which he's unable to prove his identity, the harder he tries the more he's taken for a dangerous criminal or a lunatic. . . . At last he may succeed, but by then, of course, there's no hope of collaring the broker in the real or rubber mask. . . .

* * *

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Five Anti-Propositions

5
4
3
2
1

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M.Z. Ribalow

VAMPIRE

Sinking my teeth deep into you,
I feel no guilt.
You knew I was coming.
You knew your neck was bare.
I chew, tasting the warm flesh,
Sipping thick dark blood mouthfuls
At leisure. There's no one here to stop me.

Watching you twitch,
I feel no pain.
The bleeding body
Is yours, not mine.
Not at all mine.

I never knew for sure how much you knew;
Were you my victim, or my willing sacrifice?
When we were together, it was an important question.
But not now. Now you're a carcass.
My carcass. You're dead meat I eat.
All that matters now is my appetite.

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Two Poems by Virginia R. Terris

TAKING MYSELF IN MY TEETH

Taking myself in my teeth
I begin to rip away the bandage of my skin
unrolling it first from my arms
around my head and throat and then down
my torso thighs and feet.

I unbind myself toward my bones
and among my bones the organs I have never seen.
I strip them too.

What have I been disemboweled for?
Where are the gods I was told I was made of?
The demons?

Where is the mind this poem comes from?

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CRAZY ANNIE

Crazy Annie's only going a place and a half
since she got the front half of her left foot cut off.
Before that she always went two places at once.
To the right place with the right foot.
To the left place with the left foot.
Just like everybody else.

Crazy Annie walks down the street in July
and she don't wear shoes. Oh no.
And the front half of her left foot don't get sunburned.

Her hair is all tangled up in last Thursday's wind
and through the holes in her teeth she keeps talking
to her mother who's dead fifteen years.

All the twofooted people in fourwheeled cars
going six directions giggle at her half foot.
They don't care about she's talking to her rotted mother.

Crazy Annie walking down the hot sidewalk in July
don't go no farther than she's got to.
That's why she don't wear shoes.

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Judith Mandelbaum

VISITORS IN THE HOUSE

At first light there are voices.
On the landing we can see
the parts on their heads.
On the stairs we can see
they have their coats on.

They turn to look at the skin
and hair of our bodies through
the rails of the bannister.
They shift the weight on their feet
as if they wanted to sit down.

Already they have emptied
the desk turned up the rugs
opened all the closets.
Now they are in the pantry
choosing what they expect to eat.

Others we have not counted
appear in the doorways.
Brushing past our skins
on the staircase they tell us
they are going up to smell the beds.

If you offer them the door
before they want to leave
they will step outside and enter
again pulling out the knives
they have taken from the kitchen.

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Suzanne Ostro Zavrian

HOUSEWIFE

Before, it was the wind
and the idea of disorder.
And now it is the sea in the kitchen;
waves ripple through the lemon plants,
spray wets down the pilot light,
there is sea spume on the custard—
whimsies of the water and the wind.

I have a fear of disorder;
it is disorder in the kitchen that despairs me
of ever setting it to right,
of ever setting it to right again.
Disorder in the kitchen
and the sea breaking through dreams.

How shall I get the sand out of the cupboards?
There is salt glistening in the oven;
all the pots are turning green.
Buy more mops and sponges.
Hire seven maids for seven years.
The cat keeps dragging seaweed through the house.
As the moon wanes (set the timer)
the sea keeps tracking and tracking out.
If I were married to King Canute . . .

Last night was a dream of horses,
something came riding on a great green seahorse;
it was the sea, of course.
Before, it was the wind.

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Three Poems by Kate Ellen Braverman

CLASSIFIED AD

I teach fourth grade
batik and weave plant hangers
with seashells bound in the yarns,
pine cones and stones glassy
from waves and age.
I make ceramic vases and cups,
bake breads, dance and read books.
Last summer I hiked forty-seven miles
alone in the High Sierras.
I do not smoke or take drugs.
I have lived four years
in a cottage on a hill.
My windows face the sky.
I am responsible.

Painters have shared my bed,
stockbrokers and psychologists.
All are strangers,
sleeping encased in sheet
strange unreachable mounds
fearful I will touch their dreams.
They close doors while they piss
and decline my shower.
Breakfast finds them angry
staring at a black well of coffee
complaining my cats bit their toes,
restless, wanting to change
their underwear. Winding watches.
Bound to other things.

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I want to love a blue-eyed man
and have blue-eyed babies,
sleek and smooth as cats.
And a yard perhaps,
to grow spices and flowers.
I am twenty-six
I embroider. I sing.
I am punctual and clean.

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JOB INTERVIEW

(Background)

Four brothers went by train
from Kiev to Antwerp.
They never met again.
The Bronx was farmland.
The first born gambled
and moved to Baltimore.
That was later,
during the war.

A red-haired girl worked
Eastside factories at fourteen,
afraid of subways and machinery.
She had never even been
to Warsaw.
She gave birth in Ellis Island.
The daughter was made
a Ward of the State.

(Childhood Illness)

You will notice I checked measles.
My mother sewed red spots
on my rag doll.
It took her an entire day.

But you ask nothing about winter.
My father took me sledding.
He pulled me to the top of hills.
In vacant lots we found streams.
That was in Philadelphia.

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(Sawtelle Boulevard. Twice.)

I lived on Sawtelle Boulevard
when I was eight
and the San Diego Freeway
was a harsh brown beanfield,
broken by *nothing*, even wind.
They said tractors were inching
south through the dirt.
We did not believe them.

Ten years later
I returned to precisely
the same building
with a husband who studied physics
and slept in the living room.
The same pale undernourished palms,
pieces of courtyard, slat blinds,
long gray cement hallways
neat and dull as a checkerboard.

(Education)

In Berkeley the yards lost
their boundaries.
Yellow and purple wildflowers
spilled over sidewalks
and invaded the edges of curbs.
From my bedroom window
the bridge was a rigid iron arm
holding the bay in place.

The first floor of my house
was an old weaver's shop.
Girls would throw off their shirts
and spin threads on the grass.
The day I left
one had her head blown away
by a sawed-off shot gun
in a six dollar robbery.

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(Objectives)

But you seem concerned by specifics.
I have a car, yes.
I have yellow sofas and chairs,
tables and tapestry rugs.
At noon the sun yawns lazy
across walls and the flat
thick backs of my plants.

No, it's my own pen.
These? Pebbles I found
in the high desert where
the virgin rocks sleep,
near Barstow, on an abandoned
airfield last week.
Just driving.

I could fit all that matters
into one bag.

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WHITE OUT

White, white
you are white everywhere
on your rubbery boy's body
baby fat intact.

Three white years
with your thick back
turned to a wall
and your round ass
covered by jockey shorts.
(Too big to be yours.
A gift from my father?)
Why you are antiseptic,
protected from thighs to waist.
Your twig thing
sleeps in your lap,
a small white secret.

Idiot. How could you marry me?
After one weekend in Newport Beach
with sleeping bags and sand fleas
on someone's back porch.
Then you let them push
you into a graduation suit.
You looked like a piggy
on the way to market.
I wore white orchids
(Two! You bought two!)
pinned to my dress
like grotesque breasts.

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White by moonlight.
Death by moonlight.
I cried and couldn't breathe
swept floors, slammed doors
and took a knife to our paintings
pillows and stuffed chairs.

We watched the black and white feathers
fly like fists gripping bits
of dirty gluey snow
and laughed and apologized.

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Kristina McGrath

YOU SHOULD CALL ELIZABETH NICKEL

Even though
You've written home to Nancy
Clear-headed, twice this week
Explaining how you've changed
The way she always said
You'd better

Even though
You wrote and actually told her
How it is to live calmly
In the smoothness of your realism
Expecting nothing: so sensible now
You've finally learned the correct way
To gaze at the impossible: Turn Away
Because the impossible has so often
Bitten your hand, your ear

Even though
You said words like discernment
Reserve, conservative and no longer
Does a woman's mouth inspire comparison
To sky, pearl, fern, apple, abalone
No longer is the woman's name
Like a shellfish, blue pollen, yellow corn
A magic, said backwards

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Even though
You said one should approach
A woman as one would a painting
With simply a disinterested interest
You should call Elizabeth Nickel.

Get to know Elizabeth Nickel
Who walked with you in praise of rooftops
Her arms, her shoulders, white shell, her elbows:
A confusion of stems in praise of diagonals.

You should invite Elizabeth Nickel
Down by the river and not come back
Until the sky, a blue fern, angles down
Tips of darkness, a signature, on the skin
Of the river, the skin of Elizabeth Nickel.

You should call Elizabeth Nickel
Talk it over with Elizabeth Nickel
Even though her mouth, that sensible fruit
Be the tip of April
Even though her breath
Be the blue weight of April
Even though her hand
Just another crocus.

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Idris Baker McElveen

RECOLLECTION OF TRANQUILLITY

The first time we ever quarreled
You were cutting an onion
In the kitchen of our rented cottage.
I remember vividly. We were making creole
For a late night supper with champagne,
And you were taking it seemed forever
To cut the onion,
Each time your dull paring knife
Chopped on the counter, I shifted my feet,
And I saw once in a glimpse over my shoulder
A white wedge of onion wobbling loose.
I sighed inaudibly. The butter I stirred
Had already bubbled and browned.
I was starting over with a new yellow lump
That was slipping on the silver aluminum,
When you brought, cupped in your hands,
The broken pieces, the edges all ragged,
The layers separated, bruised and oozing
Cloudy white onion juice.
I complained:
The family recipe stated specifically,
The onion must be "finely chopped,"
For what I explained were very good reasons.
Otherwise, the pungent flavors would be trapped
Irrevocably in the collapsed cellular structure
Of the delicate root.

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You sighed, I guess, inaudibly
And adjusted your glasses carefully
With two fingers (a fidget
I have since come to know
As a sign of mild perturbation)
And explained:
The pungence of onions too finely chopped
Would be simmered away. The original sharp
Burning crispness could be retained
Only in fairly large, bite-sized chunks.
But you wouldn't fight tradition.
I chopped onion on the counter
With the dull knife, while you set the table
And figured the best way of popping the cork.

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George Bogin

THE HAIRCUT

A woman came down the hill from her farm
with her two little children
to have her neighbor cut
her long, dazzling, strawberry blonde hair.
The center of things
was the round oaken kitchen table.
She sat on a stool
with a sheet up to her neck
while the two year old boy
nestled between her legs
and the baby girl slept
on a friend's shoulder.
The neighbor began to cut
a decade's growth of tresses,
passing the snips to her daughter
who laid them out on the morning paper.
The woman consulted her mirror
from time to time,
smiling with a mild terror.
When the neighbor was finished
the woman beamed with her new short haircut.
I feel like someone else, she said,
gathering up her children,
whereupon the parcel of severed hair
rose from the table
and followed them up the hill.

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Clark McCann

REPORT FROM A HANGING IN THE INTERIOR

The frame of the house he lived in
supplied the wood for the gallows.
The floors where he walked were folded
into a coffin of moderate size. We
tried to make do with the materials
at hand, saving our precious resources.
A rope was braided from the hair of
his lover. The hood was sewn from his
pockets, which were large and empty
and without holes, and the fabric (as
it should be) was coarse enough to
close out all light, and yet admit the
air to prevent suffocation. So that,
his breathing as he stood on the trap
was deep and almost without effort, as
if in appreciation for the work done
on his behalf, and we allowed sufficient
time before the drop for his eyes to
become accustomed to the darkness.

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P.G. Wodehouse
The Art of Fiction LX

Jill Krementz

When I first went to see him, I telephoned P.G. Wodehouse and asked for directions from New York to his house on Long Island. He merely chuckled, as if I had asked him to compare Euclid with Einstein or attempted some other laughably impossible task. "Oh, I can't tell you that," he said. "I don't have a clue." I learned the route anyway, and my arrival for lunch, only ten minutes late, seemed to astonish him. "You had no trouble? Oh, that is good. That's wonderful!" His face beaming at having in his house such a certified problem-solver, a junior Jeeves almost, he led me without further to-do to a telephone, which he had been dialing all morning in a

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futile effort to reach a number in New York. He had, of course, done everything right but dial the area code, an addition to the Bell system that had somehow escaped his attention since he had last attempted long distance. He was intensely pleased when New York answered, and I sunned myself in the warm glow of his gratitude for the rest of the day. All of which is by way of saying that Wodehouse, who lived four months past his ninety-third birthday, had discovered his own secret of long life: he simply ignored what was worrisome, bothersome, or confusing in the world around him.

His wife Ethel or his sister-in-law Helen did the worrying for him. On my three visits Ethel would hover around him at the beginning of our conversation to plump his pillow or fill his sherry glass, then discreetly disappear to tend to an ailing dog or cat. They had about a half dozen of each, most of them strays that had come begging to the door. Wodehouse himself had not found it necessary to carry money in twenty years, and though he had spent most of his adult life in America, he still reckoned such things as book prices in pounds and shillings. His accent, like his arithmetic, remained pure English. Aside from his writing, his two passions were the New York Mets and a soap opera called The Edge of Night. *On those extremely rare occasions when he had to leave the house for the day, Ethel was assigned to watch the program and write down exactly what had happened. "I understand that you're going to watch* The Edge of Night *with me," he said on one of my visits. "That's splendid!"*

Wodehouse lived on twelve acres in Remsenburg, a pretty, quiet little town in eastern Long Island, and from his glass-enclosed study, and most of the rest of the house, all that he could see was greenery. He was as happily isolated there as if he were living in Blandings Castle itself. He enjoyed all the hoopla that surrounded him in his old age, particularly the granting of a knighthood by Queen Elizabeth II in the 1975 New Year's honors list, but he also found the attention very tiring. "Everything more or less quiet here now," he wrote me a week after he had been dubbed Sir Pelham, "but it has been hell with all

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the interviewers." A month after that he died, as peacefully and as quietly as he had lived, according to all accounts.

INTERVIEWER

The last time I saw you was at your ninetieth birthday party in 1971.

WODEHOUSE

Oh, yes. All that ninetieth birthday thing gave me not exactly a heart attack. But I had to have treatment, you know. I'm always taking pills and things. One good effect of the treatment, however, is that I lost about twenty pounds. I feel frightfully fit now, except my legs are a bit wobbly.

INTERVIEWER

You're ninety-one now, aren't you?

WODEHOUSE

Ninety-one and a half! Ninety-two in October.

INTERVIEWER

You don't have any trouble reading now, do you?

WODEHOUSE

Oh, no!

INTERVIEWER

How about writing?

WODEHOUSE

Oh, as far as the brain goes, I'm fine. I've just finished another novel, in fact. I've got a wonderful title for it, *Bachelors Anonymous*. Don't you think that's good. Yes, everybody likes that title. Peter Schwed, my editor at Simon and Schuster, nearly always alters my titles, but he raved over that one. I think the book is so much better than my usual stuff that I don't know how I can top it. It really is funny. It's worked out awfully well. I'm rather worred about the next one. It will be a letdown almost. I don't want to be like Bernard Shaw. He turned out some awfully bad stuff in his nineties. He said he knew the stuff was bad but he couldn't stop writing.

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INTERVIEWER

What is your working schedule these days?

WODEHOUSE

I still start the day off at 7:30. I do my daily dozen exercises, have breakfast, and then go into my study. When I am between books as I am now, I sit in an armchair and think and make notes. Before I start a book I've usually got 400 pages of notes. Most of them are almost incoherent. But there's always a moment when you feel you've got a novel started. You can more or less see how it's going to work out. After that it's just a question of detail.

INTERVIEWER

You block everything out in advance then?

WODEHOUSE

Yes. For a humorous novel you've got to have a scenario, and you've got to test it so that you know where the comedy comes in, where the situations come in . . . splitting it up into scenes (you can make a scene of almost anything) and have as little stuff in between as possible.

INTERVIEWER

Is it really possible to know in a scenario where something funny is going to be?

WODEHOUSE

Yes, you can do that. Still, it's curious how a scenario gets lost as you go along. I don't think I've ever actually kept completely to one. If I've got a plot for a novel worked out and I can really get going on it, I work all the time. I work in the morning and then I probably go for a walk or something, and then I have another go at the novel. I find that from four to seven is a particularly good time for working. I never work after dinner. It's the plots that I find so hard to work out. It takes such a long time to work one out. I like to think of some scene, it doesn't matter how crazy, and work backward and forward from it until eventually it becomes quite plausible and fits neatly into the story.

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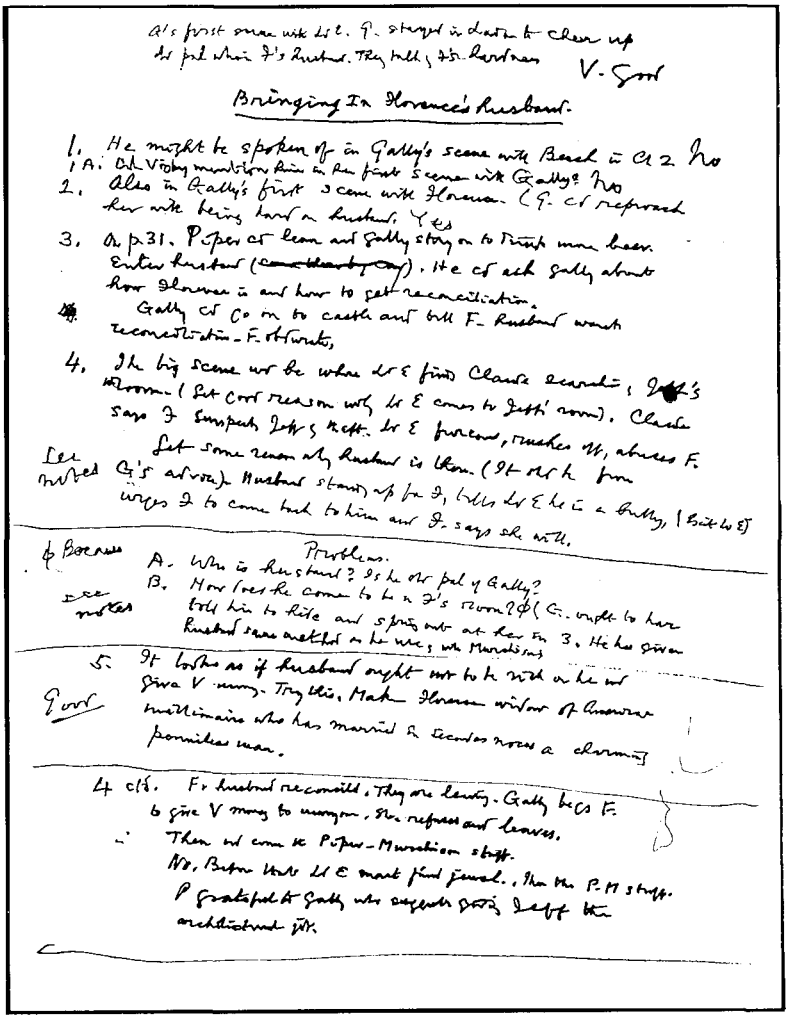

Al's first scene with Lt C. G. stirred in doubt to clear up
Is pal what F's husband. They tell, Fr Parsons V. Good

Bringing In Florence's Husband.

1. He might be spoken of in Gally's scene with Beard in Ch 2. No
1A. Ch. Vicky mention him in the first scene with Gally? No
2. Also in Gally's first scene with Florence (G. cr reproach her wife being kept a husband). Yes
3. At p.31. Piper cr Beam and Gally story on to Pratt room Beam.
Enter husband (~~Cambridge~~). He cr each Gally about how Florence is and how to get reconciliation.
Gally cr Co on to castle and tell F. Husband wants reconciliation - F. obstinate,
4. The big scene will be when Lt C finds Claude secreted; Jeff's
blown. (But Corr reason why Lt C comes to Jeff's room). Claude
says I suspect Jeff's theft. Lt C furious, rushes off, abuses F.
Let some reason why husband is blown. (It will be from
Let Mitford G's advice). Husband stands up for J, tells Lt C he is a Bully, I Britt to ES
urges J to come back to him and J. says she will.

Problem.

A. Who is the husband? Is he the pal of Gally?
B. How does he come to be in J's room? (G. ought to have told him to hide and sprung out at Lt C in 3. He has given husband some method in the wiles and Machiavellianism

5. It looks as if husband ought not to be told in the end
Give V money. Try this. Make Florence widow of American
millionaire who has married a heedless moves a charming
penniless man.

4 cl's. Fr husband reconciled. They are leaving. Gally begs F.
to give V money to manage. She refuses and leaves.
Then we come to Piper-Marathon stuff.
No. Better that Lt C must find funds. Then the P.M stuff.
P grateful to Gally who suggests going Left the
architectural job.

A page of P.G. Wodehouse's notes plotting a book about Blandings Castle on which he was at work at the time of his death.

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INTERVIEWER

How many words do you usually turn out on a good day?

WODEHOUSE

Well, I've slowed up a good deal now. I used to write about 2,000 words. Now I suppose I do about 1,000.

INTERVIEWER

Do you work seven days a week?

WODEHOUSE

Oh, yes, rather. Always.

INTERVIEWER

Do you type or do you write in longhand?

WODEHOUSE

I used to work entirely on the typewriter. But this last book I did sitting in a lawn chair and writing by hand. Then I typed it out. Much slower of course. But I think it's a pretty good method; it does pretty well.

INTERVIEWER

Do you go back and revise very much?

WODEHOUSE

Yes. And I very often find that I've got something which ought to come in another place, a scene which originally I put in chapter two and then when I get to chapter ten, I feel it would come in much better there. I'm sort of molding the whole time.

INTERVIEWER

How long does it take you to write a novel?

WODEHOUSE

Well, in the old days I used to rely on it being about three

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months, but now it might take any length of time. I forget exactly how long *Bachelors Anonymous* took, but it must have been six or seven months.

INTERVIEWER

That still seems very fast to me.

WODEHOUSE

It's still good, yes.

INTERVIEWER

If you were asked to give advice to somebody who wanted to write humorous fiction, what would you tell him?

WODEHOUSE

I'd give him practical advice and that is always get to the dialogue as soon as possible. I always feel the thing to go for is speed. Nothing puts the reader off more than a great slab of prose at the start. I think the success of every novel—if it's a novel of action—depends on the high spots. The thing to do is to say to yourself "Which are my big scenes?" and then get every drop of juice out of them. The principle I always go on in writing a novel is to think of the characters in terms of actors in a play. I say to myself, if a big name were playing this part, and if he found that after a strong first act he had practically nothing to do in the second act, he would walk out. Now, then, can I twist the story so as to give him plenty to do all the way through? I believe the only way a writer can keep himself up to the mark is by examining each story quite coldly before he starts writing it and asking himself if it is all right *as a story*. I mean, once you go saying to yourself, "This is a pretty weak plot as it stands, but I'm such a hell of a writer that my magic touch will make it OK," you're sunk. If they aren't in interesting situations, characters can't be major characters, not even if you have the rest of the troop talk their heads off about them.

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INTERVIEWER

What do you think makes a story funny?

WODEHOUSE

I think character mostly. You know instinctively what's funny and what isn't if you're a humorous writer. I don't think a man can deliberately sit down to write a funny story unless he has got a sort of slant on life that leads to funny stories. If you take life fairly easily, then you take a humorous view of things. It's probably because you were born that way. Lord Emsworth and his pig—I *know* they're funny.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever know anyone who was actually like Lord Emsworth?

WODEHOUSE

No. Psmith is the only one of my characters who is drawn from life. He started in a boys' story, and then I did a grownup story about him in the *Saturday Evening Post*. People sometimes want to know why I didn't go on with Psmith. But I don't think that the things that made him funny as a very young man would be funny in an older man. He had a very boring sort of way of expressing himself. Called everybody "Comrade" and all that sort of thing. I couldn't go on with him. I don't think he'd have worked as a maturer character. In a way my character Galahad is really Psmith grown up.

INTERVIEWER

But Galahad works very well as a character.

WODEHOUSE

Yes, Galahad is fine.

INTERVIEWER

How old is he supposed to be?

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WODEHOUSE

How old all those characters are I don't know. The first short story I wrote about Lord Emsworth said that he had been to Eton in 1864, which would make him a hundred-and-something now!

INTERVIEWER

What period are the books set in?

WODEHOUSE

Well, between the wars, rather. I try not to date them at all, but it's rather difficult. I'm bad at remembering things, like when flying really became fashionable. The critics keep saying that the world I write about never existed. But of course it did. It was going strong between the wars. In a way it is hard to write the sort of stuff I do now because it really is so out-of-date. The character of Jeeves is practically unknown in England now, though I believe someone told me the butler was creeping back. Bertie Wooster and Oofie Proster have more or less vanished too. I suppose a typical member of the Drones Club now is someone with a job and very earnest about it. Those rather hit or miss days have passed away. But thank God, that doesn't seem to matter!

INTERVIEWER

I suppose that world has gone the way of spats. You were very fond of spats, weren't you? Tell me a little about them.

WODEHOUSE

I don't know why spats went out! The actual name was spatterdashers, and you fastened them over your ankles, you see, to prevent the spatter dashing you. They certainly lent tone to your appearance, and they were awfully comfortable, especially when you wore them in cold weather. I've written articles, which were rather funny, about how I used to go about London. I would borrow my brother's frock coat and my uncle's hat, but my spats were always new and impeccable.

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The butler would open the door and take in my old top coat and hat and sniff as if to say, "Hardly the sort of thing we are accustomed to." And then he would look down at the spats and everything would be all right. It's a *shame* when things like spats go out.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever have a butler like Jeeves?

WODEHOUSE

No, never like Jeeves. My butlers were quite different, though I believe J.M. Barrie had one just like Jeeves.

INTERVIEWER

How did you create Jeeves, then?

WODEHOUSE

I only intended to use him once. His first entrance was: "Mrs. Gregson to see you, Sir," in a story called *Extricating Young Gussie*. He only had one other line, "Very good, Sir. Which suit will you wear?" But then I was writing a story, *The Artistic Career of Corky*, about two young men, Bertie Wooster and his friend Corky, getting into a lot of trouble, and neither of them had brains enough to get out of the trouble. I thought: Well, how can I get them out? And I thought: "Suppose one of them had an omniscient valet?" I wrote a short story about him, then another short story, then several more short stories and novels. That's how a character grows. I think I've written nine Jeeves novels now and about thirty short stories.

INTERVIEWER

I like Jeeves, but my favorite character of yours is really Lord Emsworth.

WODEHOUSE

Oh, yes. He's about my favorite character, too. Well, now, he must be entirely out-of-date. I don't suppose anybody in

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England is living in a castle like that any more.

INTERVIEWER

Maybe not, but I suspect that there are still some woolly-headed English aristocrats around.

WODEHOUSE

Oh, yes?

INTERVIEWER

Will you write any more Lord Emsworth stories?

WODEHOUSE

I don't know if I shall. I've got him in such a pleasant position now. He's free of both his sisters. He's got his pig, and he's living alone and loving it. He's comfortable by himself. It seems rather unkind to disturb him . . . I do think I'd like to have a try, though. You see, *that's* the problem. I'd love to do a Lord Emsworth story, but what could it be about? I mean, what could happen? The trouble is, you see, that I've so featured the pig that I couldn't leave her out. And yet, what could happen to a pig? It is difficult to find plots when you have written so much. The ideas don't seem to come to me now. I suppose it's temporary. I've always felt like this in between books. But I have used up every possible situation. If I do get a good idea, I find it is something I wrote in the '30s.

INTERVIEWER

I think the closest you have come to sex in your novels is a kiss on the cheek. Have you ever been tempted to put anything spicier into them?

WODEHOUSE

No. No, I don't think the framework of the novel would stand it. Sex, of course, can be awfully funny, but you have to know how to handle it. And I don't think I can handle it properly.

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INTERVIEWER

Sex aside, have you ever thought of writing anything more serious?

WODEHOUSE

No. I don't think I'm capable of writing anything but the sort of thing I do write. I couldn't write a serious book.

INTERVIEWER

Did you always know you would be a writer?

WODEHOUSE

Yes, always. I know I was writing stories when I was five. I don't remember what I did before that. Just loafed, I suppose. I was about twenty when I sold my first story, and I've been a full-time writer since 1902. I can't think of myself as anything but a writer.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever have another career?

WODEHOUSE

When I left school. I was first working for scholarship at Oxford when my father's finances took rather a nasty jar and I wasn't able to go up to Oxford, and instead was put in the bank, the Hong-Kong Shanghai Bank, which I hated at first but later got to like. The bank had branches all over the East. After two years in the London branch you'd get your orders to go out there, which of course appalled me because in my two years I never learned a thing about banking. The idea of going out to Bombay or somewhere and being a branch manager and being paid in rupees scared me stiff.

All this time I was writing and getting rejections. Because the trouble is when you start writing, you write awful stuff. And I was writing on banking hours too. My second year I got into the cash department and my job was to enter the deposits on the ledger. After a while a new ledger was provided and I sat

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down and suddenly thought of a wonderful idea—to write *in* the new ledger an account of the Great Opening of the New Ledger, with the King coming and all that. And I did this and, having done it, repented and thought this was going to get me into trouble, and I got a knife and I cut the first page of the ledger out. It so happened that the Chief Cashier had got a long feud on with the stationers and he'd been trying to catch them out for years and when he saw this ledger with the front page missing, he thought, "Ah, this is my chance," and he went and cursed them for giving us an imperfect ledger. But I didn't get the sack for it.

I left the Bank after that second year, however, to go to the *Globe*. I had been doing occasional day jobs for an old master of mine who'd become a journalist and ran the comic column at the *Globe*. I'd pretend I'd sprained my back lifting a ledger or something, and I'd do my work for the *Globe*. Then when he went on summer holiday, I took his place and eventually got on the staff in 1902 when he resigned. In those days the pay was 3 guilders a week (about $15) and I could live on that very well.

INTERVIEWER

From those days to now, have you continued to read criticism of your own work?

WODEHOUSE

Yes. I get a lot of reviews sent to me. They are invariably favorable. And somehow I always read them really carefully. You do get tips from them. Now that last Jeeves book of mine, *Jeeves and the Tie That Binds*, I forget which critic it was, but he said that the book was dangerously near to self-parody. I know what he meant. I had exaggerated Jeeves and Bertie. Jeeves always reciting some poetry or something. I'll correct that in the next one. I do think one can learn from criticism. In fact, I'm a pretty good critic of my own work. I know when it isn't as good as it ought to be.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you ever feel angry at critics? Do you ever feel they are unfair?

WODEHOUSE

No, I don't think so. You always feel that you can't please everybody.

INTERVIEWER

Some critics, going beyond any particular book, think that your short stories are better than your novels. What do you think?

WODEHOUSE

Yes, I think I'd sooner write short stories than novels. I feel really happy with a short story. I like the sense of completing something. The only trouble is that if I do get a good idea, I rather want to work it into a novel. I mean, I'm rather wasting a novel if I write a short story.

INTERVIEWER

Who are your own favorite humorists?

WODEHOUSE

The ones I like most are all dead—James Thurber, Robert Benchley, Wolcott Gibbs, George S. Kaufman.

INTERVIEWER

Do you like S.J. Perelman?

WODEHOUSE

Oh, yes, yes, yes. He's quite a favorite of mine. But there are very few writers like that now, just writing funny stuff, not like in the '20s and '30s. When I first came over here all the evening papers, the evening *World* and the others, all had funny poems and columns in them. I liked FPA's column very much. But I don't think people buy funny books nowadays. I never

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have had a big sale over here. Where I get my money is England, Sweden, Italy, France, and Germany.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there are more humorous writers in England than America?

WODEHOUSE

They haven't got any in England either.

INTERVIEWER

Do you like Peter DeVries?

WODEHOUSE

I'm not frightfully keen on him. I haven't read very much of his stuff. But I'll tell you who is awfully good is Jean Kerr. Ooooh, she's wonderful. *Mary, Mary* was one of the best plays I've ever read. Anthony Powell is also a good writer. It's extraordinary how interesting his stuff is, you know. And it just goes on and on, with nothing much in the way of scenes or anything. You wouldn't call it funny stuff, though, would you?

INTERVIEWER

No, I don't suppose so. What have you been reading most recently?

WODEHOUSE

I've been reading the old books, books that I've read before. The first time you read a book you don't read it at all carefully; you just read it for the story. You have to keep rereading. Every year or so I read Shakespeare straight through. But then I go to the latest by Agatha Christie or Rex Stout. I read every book of theirs. I do like a book with an elaborate plot. But I haven't any definite plan of reading. I read almost everything, and I like anything that's good. I've just reread a book of A.A. Milne's called *Two People*, which I had read several

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times before. His novel is simply a novel of character. It's not the sort of thing I can write myself, but as a reader I enjoy it thoroughly.

INTERVIEWER

Do you read any contemporary novels?

WODEHOUSE

I've read some of Norman Mailer.

INTERVIEWER

Do you like his writing?

WODEHOUSE

I don't like his novels very much, but he writes very interesting non-fiction stuff. I liked *Advertisements for Myself* very much.

INTERVIEWER

How about the Beats? Someone like Jack Kerouac, for instance, who died a few years ago?

WODEHOUSE

Jack Kerouac died! Did he?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

WODEHOUSE

Oh . . . Gosh, they do die off, don't they?

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever go back and reread your own books?

WODEHOUSE

Oh, yes.

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INTERVIEWER

Are you ever surprised by them?

WODEHOUSE

I'm rather surprised that they're so good.

INTERVIEWER

Of all the books you've written, do you have any favorites?

WODEHOUSE

Oh, I'm very fond of a book called *Quick Service* and another called *Sam in the Suburbs*, a very old one. But I really like them all. There are very few exceptions.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever been envious of another writer?

WODEHOUSE

No, never. I'm really such a voracious reader that I'm only too grateful to get some stuff I can read.

INTERVIEWER

Have any other writers ever been envious of you?

WODEHOUSE

Well, I always thought A.A. Milne was rather. We were supposed to be quite good friends, but, you know, in a sort of way I think he was a pretty jealous chap. I think he was probably jealous of all other writers. But I loved his stuff. That's one thing I'm very grateful for: I don't have to like an awful person to like his stuff. I like Somerset Maugham's stuff tremendously, for example, but I should think he was unhappy all the time, wouldn't you? He was an unpleasant man.

INTERVIEWER

Was he unpleasant to you?

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WODEHOUSE

No. He was all right to me. We got along on just sort of "how-do-you-do?" terms. I remember walking back from a cricket match at Lords in London, and Maugham came along on the other side. He looked at me and I looked at him, and we were thinking the same thing: "Oh, my God, shall we have to stop and talk?" Fortunately we didn't.

INTERVIEWER

I don't think writers get along very well with one another.

WODEHOUSE

No, I don't think they do really. I think they're jealous of each other. I do get along with them superficially, if everything's all right. But you feel they're resenting you, rather . . . What do you imagine the standing of a writer like Arnold Bennett is now?

INTERVIEWER

I don't think anybody reads him.

WODEHOUSE

That's what I think, too. But when he was alive, he was very much a sort of great literary man.

INTERVIEWER

Let's switch to your own life for a minute. You and Ethel were living in France when the Germans invaded in 1940. You were interned for about a year in Germany and Ethel had to live in Berlin. Why didn't you escape to England when you had a chance?

WODEHOUSE

Oh, everything happened so suddenly. Until the Germans arrived there didn't seem to be any danger at all. I suppose really the whole thing was that we had two dogs we were very fond of, and because of the English quarantine laws we

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couldn't take them into England. We aren't very good at organizing a thing like that.

INTERVIEWER

You later made some broadcasts from Berlin for CBS radio describing your life in the camp. Those broadcasts caused great controversy in Britain, and for a time you were rather savagely denounced there. Do you regret making them?

WODEHOUSE

Oh, yes. Oh, rather. I wish I hadn't. It never occurred to me that there was anything wrong in the broadcasts. They altered my whole life. I suppose I would have gone back to England and so on if it hadn't been for them. Yet they were so perfectly harmless, just a comic description of my adventures in camp. Of course nobody ever published them.

INTERVIEWER

Do you resent the way you were treated by the English?

WODEHOUSE

Oh, no, no, no. Nothing of that sort. The whole thing seems to have blown over now.

INTERVIEWER

Would you ever like to go back to England?

WODEHOUSE

I'd certainly like to, but at my age it's awfully difficult to get a move on. But I'd like to go back for a visit in the spring. They all seem to want me to go back. The trouble is that I've never flown. I suppose that would solve everything.

INTERVIEWER

I imagine most people think that you live in England even now. But you are an American citizen, and you have spent most of your life here.

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WODEHOUSE

Yes, that is true. I have always been awfully fond of America. It always seemed like my own country. I don't know why. I'd much sooner live here than in England, I think. I can't think of any place in England I prefer to this. I used to like London, but I don't think I'd like it now. I had always wanted to go to America, and when I got a holiday from the *Globe*, in 1904, I came over for about three weeks. Indeed, I saw more of New York then than I've ever seen since, and having been in America gave my reputation in London a tremendous boost. I was suddenly someone who counted to editors who threw me out before. Then I came back in 1909 for another visit and lived in Greenwich Village. It was a quiet sort of place, all of us young writers trying to get on. I was going to return to England when I sold two short stories to *Cosmopolitan* and *Colliers* for a total of $500—much more than I had ever earned before. So I resigned from the *Globe* and stayed. But the wolf was always at the door. I used to think I was being followed about by little men with black beards. If it hadn't been for Frank Crowninshield, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, taking all the articles I could do, I should have been in real trouble. When Ethel and I got married in September 1914, she had $75 and I had $50.

The *Saturday Evening Post* gave me my first break. I wrote a novel called *Something New* and they bought it for $3500 and serialized it. They then bought *Uneasy Money*, *Picadilly Jim* and *A Damsel in Distress* and gave me a raise with each one, $5000, $7500 and $10,000.

Just about that time I started writing musical comedies—eighteen in all—with Guy Bolton and Jerry Kern. I did the lyrics to Jerry's melodies. Our terrific smash was *Oh Boy!* So it all came in a rush. Guy is one of the best fellows I ever met. He lives a mile from here; that's why we came down here. We were spending the weekend with him, and Ethel went out and came back for lunch and said, "I've bought a house."

INTERVIEWER

You once told me that when you worked with Ziegfeld, he

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said that he envied your happy temperament.

WODEHOUSE

Yes, he always used to say that.

INTERVIEWER

To what do you attribute your good nature? Was it a happy childhood?

WODEHOUSE

I certainly had a very happy childhood. My position was the same as Rudyard Kipling's. His parents were in India and boarded him out with a family in England. My parents were in Hong Kong, and I was also boarded out in England. Yet Kipling had one hell of a time, and I got on marvelously with the people I was with and I loved them. What *can* you attribute a good nature to, I wonder. Do you think you're born with it? I suppose you are.

INTERVIEWER

There must have been some bad times for you, even so.

WODEHOUSE

Do you know I don't think I've had any really bad times. I disliked the bank I had to work in when I was young very much my first month or so. But once I got used to it, I became very fond of it.

INTERVIEWER

How about the war years, particularly the year in the German internment camp? That must have been pretty bad.

WODEHOUSE

I don't know. Looking back to it, it wasn't at all unpleasant. Everybody seems to think a German internment camp must be a sort of torture chamber. It was really perfectly normal and ordinary. The camp had an extraordinarily nice commander,

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and we did all sorts of things, you know. We played cricket, that sort of thing. Of course, I was writing all the time. Most writers would have gotten fifty novels out of the experience—the men they met there—but I have never written a word about it, except those broadcasts.

INTERVIEWER

It sounds as if you've never had any worries at all.

WODEHOUSE

I'm rather blessed in a way. I really don't worry about anything much. I can adjust myself to things pretty well.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think it is essential for a writer to have a happy home life?

WODEHOUSE

Well, I think it's a *tremendous* help, yes. Ethel has always been wonderful in that way. You've got to be alone quite a bit when you're writing. She doesn't mind that at all. I've always had great luck with the things that really matter in life. I should imagine an unhappy marriage would simply kill a man.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think you would have been so happy if you had not been a writer?

WODEHOUSE

No. I think a writer's life is the ideal life. I can never understand these fellows like Evelyn Waugh who did not always have the idea of being a writer. I *always* wanted to be a writer.

INTERVIEWER

Do you always enjoy writing?

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WODEHOUSE

Oh, yes. I love writing. I never feel really comfortable unless I am either actually writing or have a story going. I could not stop writing.

—GERALD CLARKE

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On the Feast of Malcolm

Diane Vreuls

"Dear Mal," I write. "All is forgiven stay there."

Nine birds sweep down from the sky and light on the pine tree you planted last fall. The scrawny boughs crack and dip in the snow. They are larger than robins. Predominant color is black. Largely black? All black. Iridescent. In flight the center feathers of the long wedge-shaped tail are often depressed. I can't see that; they sit. They are very noisy. Their harsh cacks are not songs.

Upstairs someone stirs. A load of wash pours down the plumbing, down the pipe near the table where I sit. Trousers. Gym shoes. Towels. It's Grace. I close the bird book and freeze on my chair. The feet go back to bed. I'll have to rise sooner. But not too soon. Thomas retires at four. Jempita gets up at seven and starts cracking eggs in the kitchen. Dawn would be best, but it doesn't occur this season, the night just gets lighter, the streetlamps shut off. That always wakes me.

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It's exactly the moment to dial someone up from a dream, you can talk without interruption. Clo. I've been tracing her now for months, you can't find women by phone. I don't know her husband's name. He's the one who would answer, pass the phone to her pillow and sit on her edge of the bed demanding "Who is it? What's wrong?" and they'd fight about me over breakfast. I like her lost, like ringing up distant cities and asking for Clo: the sleepy voices of Information, it's six a.m. there, it's dark there; the long pause while they look for her name, the silence and dark of Detroit pouring into my lap.

Washcloths. Undershirts. Bras.

"Dear Mal," I write, "cancel the birdseed." Six bags are stacked out by the chimney, I can see four of them through the window and faintly the path the deliveryman makes in the snow. It's almost healed over; tomorrow he'll lay it open, dragging a fifty pound bag through the yard to the wall near the feeder. I used to like opening those sacks. Fought over who'd get to do it, pluck the string that unravels the stitching of flour sacks, potato sacks, seed. Now I won't touch them. Too many years you'd set seed in November, kept them from going south, then you'd fly off on trips and leave me instructions. I'd forget till I shovelled the driveway to pick you up at the airport, it's late, your plane's landed, I'd tug at the string, not the right one, hack open the sack, spill seed all over the snow. This year I've kept back every crumb. But the birds won't move from the feeder. I see them first thing I come down in the morning. Brown. Barred wings, tail, belly. Smaller than robin. Pale below. Too dumb to pull the string.

Morris is up. I hear his alarm. He will shave and go back to bed. Out of consideration. "Can't do it later," he says, "you'll be watching the morning news." I never watch the news. Climbing back into bed will wake her. She says "Did you reset the clock?" They get up at noon.

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Why won't they go? They've been here since Thanksgiving, all your Morosco cousins. After fending them off for years, you called on the third martini and invited them up for the day. "Fill out the table," you said. It was new and very long. Our final antique. That made everything on our list, everything but the birdbath. They drove up in two cars bringing jello for salad. You'd stood at your captain's chair to propose the toast. We drank as if we'd heard it, but you'd been silent, I'm sure of it now. Perhaps you were thinking, as I was, just what to be thankful for? Next morning when you were departed, I explained to them fully, expecting they'd drive home at once. They're waiting for your return?

I call Missoula Montana. Clo had a brother there. It is dark in Missoula, only five a.m. A sleepy voice says he's not listed, a cold wind whistles out the holes. The dining room door starts banging. It does that since Thomas fixed it. "You sure need a man around here," he said. "Like a saw needs wood." Planed an inch off the edges of every downstairs door. Now when you open a drawer or cabinet and release the smallest wind, they all bang open at once and let it rush through. He's promised to screw in hooks and eyes. I've hidden the tools.

Five of them land on the cedar windbreak you put in last spring. Size between robin and sparrow. Miscellaneous yellow markings, band at the end of the tail. Crested, shading to gray on the rump. I spill coffee on the index. It's too cold. I have to wait till it cools to drink it and then I forget. It's my teeth, they ache all the time now. They're going to fall out any minute, fall into my saucer like beads. I've stopped eating apples. I use the blender. The cousins have voiced concern. Grace especially. She's twelve years older than I but remarkably trim. Comes from always exercising, it's second nature. Standing in front of the icebox, flexing her buttocks, kicking out as she walks, rotating her inner arms as the rinses the dishes. "You sit too much," says Grace.

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I do. Starting early in the morning. "It's my work," I explain, but it bothered you too. "It's because I'm so tall." An effort at common sightlines. Paranoia about what's being said. It's the first thing I do upon entering. Any ledge or appliance will serve, the stove, the radiator. It drove you wild. "You'll break the connections," you said. You always smelled gas.

I hear Jempita's alarm, hurry into the kitchen to fill my cup. So I won't have to see her slipping around in your sweat-socks, robed in your lumber jacket, using the cuffs for hotpads. They all wear your clothes, especially the women, a change from their double knit sheaths. The men don't fit, Thomas had to go shopping. He came back with a pair of unclaimed shoes from the repair shop counter sale. They're yours, the suede. On the way out I notice the glue on the drysink. I'll have to hide it. He plans to repair the bathroom shutter just like the ones in the study, glued shut.

"Dear Mal. Did Clo marry Frank?" It's unlikely. We'd been together at school. All of us, even Frank, hated Frank, and elected him President of the Class. Happened like this: there were no nominations, everyone voted for hisorher self. We held a second election, same thing. A committee studied the problem and decided to give us two votes. We each voted first for ourselves, then for the least popular kid we could think of. Frank, and he won. That's how people like Frank get ahead. He's probably gone right on winning; but please, not Clo.

A car starts up in our driveway; no, next door. It doesn't frighten the birds. He'll run it twenty minutes before he drives off. Only goes three blocks, down to the bakery. He's a nice man. He repeatedly asks how you're doing. I think he thinks you're in traction, because of the ladder that fell from our window onto his hedge. Thomas left it there when he replaced the storm. Mrs. Kidney's curious as well. She ordered those Dutch cigars just for you, I felt guilty and bought a box for the mailman. He expects large gifts.

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We didn't do badly. We planned to practice together, take his and hers cases, work out our problems in court on other people's divorces. We hadn't the constitution and switched to tort. Or were we doctors? Opticians? You took the right eye and I the left? Doesn't matter, I quit to have children but took to the isolation and put it off. I won't go back, not till I'm paid what's owed me. In isolation. I'll arrange to get up sooner. I'll rent a different house.

I am breaking this chair by squatting this way. My cup has left rings. There's something wrong with the lamp, it flickers. If I turn it off it's still too dark to see, I told you you planted too many trees. Shall I let Thomas thin them? He's dying to use the saw.

Is there time to phone St. Louis? A flock too large to count on the weeds by the fence, some darting closer. Size near sparrow. Large white wing patches, underparts mainly white. Voice, a low twitter while feeding, a short whistle in flight. I can't hear them: slips, shirts, dustrags flush down the pipe. Somebody (Morris?) is running the bedroom TV. Jempita is stumbling down the backstairs. Pigeons. A hawk owl, feeds by day, one of the two that do. Shall I switch on the battery birdbath? It came yesterday, Christmas, how could you leave first? Do I really want to forgive you? I planned my move for so long. Every morning I'd vote. Jempita is ready for breakfast. Here come the flickers. Mal, what was the toast?

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Four Poems by Barry Schechter

THE LITTLE HAT

For the sin of pride the authorities made me wear this little hat. It fits me no better than a baby turtle, this blue plastic derby secured by a rubberband round the chin. Though I was allowed to stay on in my high position, my authority was subverted like a poster scrawled over with mustaches and black teeth. The hat defaced my famous scowl, transfiguring it, in the eyes of subordinates, to the grimace of a rambunctious birthday boy. Some men can meet the Queen with spaghetti in their hair; can cartwheel down the street in Bozo masks and command the dignity of a passing funeral. But I could never be respected as a naked emperor: I can only make men stammer and stare at their shoes even when my tie clip is in place. Conspicuous? I might as well have donned the Taj Mahal as that tiny plastic derby!

I tried using my high position to make *everyone* wear little hats. But they seemed oblivious to their duncecaps, fire hats, derbies and stovepipes: they didn't share my disgrace; they only mirrored it. One clerk, seized by the holiday mood, tooted a sneeze-horn in my face!

Once I tried concealing the problem beneath a full-sized bowler. But a cop snatched it off my head and the little hat shone like a naked turtle.

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NOT A CLOWN

First, I am *not* a clown. Clowns are paid to make you laugh. *I'm* paid *to* laugh. Listen. You see: the effect is like a firecracker in a barrel of mousetraps—if you're in the vicinity, laughter springs open your jaws. Commentators, attempting to explain this contagion, note that I never laugh the same way twice. My laughter must supply a hidden meaning of the joke, they say, like the exegesis of a text. But my mirth isn't confined to jokes. Does it point to inexpressible meanings in *things*? There is a guffaw, for example, for the tree near my window, that tattered old man insisting on the same monotonous gesture. There is a chortle which is the chord of three ideas struck at once: a man carrying a hatrack; a wishbone in the center of an enormous plate; an idiot watching a snowfall. The titter signifying death is so faint it touches the ear's canal like a reflected star. But what of the laughter that seems to come from nowhere? It is with this that I have had my great success in curing the insane. They tell me they had been reaching for this laugh in the first place, like a man who, groping for a lamp, thrusts his finger into an open socket.

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THE CHICKEN WHO WAS NOT AN EMPIRICIST

My father owned a novelty store—a most peculiar man. From early childhood I learned to distrust *a priori* judgments: Nothing could be predicted. Behind the closed lid, the outstretched hand, what streamers, shocks, accordions of foam! Our belief in the uniformity of nature is naive, said Russell, who compared mankind to chickens: because the farmer feeds them every day they "know" it is empirically impossible for him to open the cage and wring their necks.

At thirteen I had adjusted to my surroundings by adopting a stoical pessimism bordering on catatonia. "Have I told you about the chicken who was not an empiricist?" my father asked one evening. He was smoking his after-dinner cigar and looked unusually serious. "It stopped laying eggs."

"I guess it realized," I said, "there was no point in playing *their* game."

"But it *has* to play their game. If it assumes the food is poisoned, for example, it can eat or starve. In the meantime the other chickens are happy because they accept their condition with naive faith. Sleep on it, son."

As I turned off the bedside lamp I considered my father's parable. Perhaps I *ought* to trust him: not that there were any grounds for such trust, but, like the chickens, I'd be at ease. I pulled back the covers and sank into the soft down . . . the bones . . . the beak.

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PROFILE

For years I was known as The Great Profile. I had discarded the other half of my face as if it were an ugly Siamese twin. I was a poet, and poetry had turned my head. You see, I could never decide whether to write for everyone or for one reader: so I read poems to the empty space just above her left shoulder. People thought I was a visionary. I spent an entire year in three-quarter profile, staring past every shoulder. By now I was writing entirely for Posterity, which I conceived as the sum of all those empty spaces. I lived in a Phantom Zone where elbows poked me and voices swore, but I never saw a face. Audiences at poetry readings thought I was looking straight into heaven: I was staring into corners where mops leaned like the ragged survivors of a depopulated planet. Invisible coteries guided me through the streets.

Once I stared into a corner and saw an apparition beneath the fire-exit sign. It was my discarded quarter-profile, cold and dead as a meteorite. So much for Posterity! I gave my head an extra quarter-turn, and here was the profile of the poet laureate, suitable for tracing straight onto a medallion. I didn't feel as if I'd torn myself in half, but as if I'd chopped away rock from the outline of a perfect sculpture. I strode sideways through adoring crowds, till the day my perfect profile crashed through a storefront. I was uncut, but so ashamed I wanted to turn my face completely, like the moon darkening into its final phase. Instead I began turning the other way, and with the humility of a pie-spattered comedian slowly revealing his features, I looked straight into your faces.

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Walter Knupfer

A SPECIAL OCCASION

Uncle Gabe is a thoughtful man. We were out Christmas shopping together this season, & as I walked by a department store jammed with Yuletide shoppers, I saw the most remarkable woman waiting for a bus. She was splendid. Blonde, blue eyes, long legs, perfectly developed breasts. . . . "Uncle Gabe," said I, "she is splendid." A huge smile lit his face. "You like her?" he said. "Well, you shall have her." I was dumbfounded by his offer. Actually, I let the matter drop & we continued our shopping as if I had never seen her. But on Christmas Day, after sitting down to our customary oysters-on-the-half-shell Mornay with Brut Champagne, Consommé Julienne with a Pomerol, Prime Ribs of Roast Beef *au jus* & a '64 Clos de Bèze Chambertin, *fromages*, walnut torts & flaming sherbet, Uncle Gabe & I excused ourselves from the festivities & drove out to the quarry. Since Uncle Gabe was mildly eccentric, such diversions were nothing out of the ordinary. I assumed there was an emotional attachment to his heady youth, & that this day had special meaning for him, though Uncle Gabe was a quiet man year round, & rarely let his feelings be known. It was dark when we got there. Uncle Gabe asked me to remain in the car. He got out, & I could hear some sort of rumbling in the trunk. After a few minutes of tinkering, he opened the door for me & I stepped out into the blackest night. He groped for something & a motor started up. I guess he had his own portable generator. It made a terrible noise. "Now, my boy," he said. "Get ready for the surprise of your life." & when he hit a switch, a brilliant light flooded the scene. I let out a gasp. "Uncle Gabe! You shouldn't have!" & surely, there on the rim of the quarry, the light caressing & refining the perfect curves of her nakedness, was my loadstone, my fountainhead. . . . Words can't describe it adequately, for this was the very same woman waiting for the bus when we

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were shopping. ''How about that, son, do you like it?'' I could barely hear Uncle Gabe, so great was my surprise. ''Of course I do, Uncle Gabe. Of course I do!'' Well, if my surprise was horrendous, it soon gave way to astonishment, for the spotlight swung to the side & began panning to reveal, believe it or not, 49 others absolutely identical! The light brought out the same perfect curves, the same contrasts. There were 50 of my fondest dreams, standing there, all inviting. ''Well, come on boy, what do you think?'' said Uncle Gabe. ''Don't just stand there, do something!'' I was trembling. Timorously I stepped forward. Their eyes were the same shade of blue, even looked in the same direction. They all seemed eager to accept me. But to tell you the truth, I didn't know where to begin. 50 of my glorious dreams, all together, no one of them any more beautiful than the rest of them. No one stood out as particularly enticing. ''Uncle Gabe,'' I whined. ''I can't do it. I'm limp. I can't do it. They're all the same.'' Then Uncle Gabe did something I've never seen him do. He threw a temper tantrum. He jumped up & down. He flew in circles. He twisted & spat. The ground shook. The trees groaned. I understood his rage. He must have gone to great lengths for me this Christmas. But after he had calmed down & settled into a deep depression, taking a drink now & then from a bottle tucked away in his vest, I tried explaining my impotence. I told him I was moved by his generosity, that I wanted his presents, but that despite his Romantic attachment to the locale, I needed a different context for appreciating the gift. They were like legs from a mail-order catalogue which look better somewhere else, maybe in another magazine or on someone's ceiling. What I would prefer was having the gift broken up over a period of time, between special occasions or events, preceding or following needs, etc. He didn't understand, but he agreed to the following arrangements: they come now when they are needed. They satisfy me. & I have overcome my fear of each singular presence demanding something different from me, because, in truth, they are all alike. They might as well be one person. I have never suspected Uncle Gabe of deceiving me, & sending the same one over & over again. To this day, he has called me a hypocrite, but true to his form, he has never reneged the contract.

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Adam LeFevre

ETHICS

Where I went to college in the purple valley of northwest Massachusetts, there was a fellow in my class who used to drag a brick around by a string. He called it his "pet brick." Every night he would drag his brick into the campus snack bar when the snackbar was most crowded, and order two vanilla milkshakes—one for himself, one for his brick. The first time I saw him I laughed at the absurdity of the proposition. A pet brick! A brick drinking a milkshake! The subsequent occasions of my seeing this fellow and his brick made me respond differently. Often I was angry, thinking he dragged the brick for just the clamor that will always attend the outrageous. Sometimes, when I could convince myself that he and his brick were actually a charade protesting technology gone wild or man's inhumanity to man, I could feel the pleasant twinge of belonging to a fraternity of hoodwinkers. But when I saw him in the early morning, dragging his brick through the empty quad, my heart would fill with the silent despair that rose from the strange interplay between them. Just as it was impossible to know exactly how he felt about the brick, in those days I never knew how I should feel about anything. Only one thing was clear. He did not love the brick. Nor did the brick love him. This fact became my reference point in all matters of faith.

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Michael Benedikt

THE CRIMINAL ANIMAL

Human mothers are right to take such exceptional care of their babies; after all, even from birth, there is no animal which is quite like man. Yes, even as a child, Man differs from the babies of other species. Oh, I know what everyone with an I.Q. of over 43 during some period or other of unjust war is thinking: that man is a quite unique animal because he is the only one to make war on his own kind, the swine. But, believe me, my children, he is unique even earlier, otherwise he might never have survived to be the only creature to make war on his own kind. Unique first of all is the voice he first uses to summon attention, or invoke aid. Consider: whereas one laughs for joy at the mew of a very young kitten, the peeping of chickadees, or the squawking of the monkey—not to mention the mumbling of the baby elephant, the snort of the childish alligator, or the harmonious warblings of little whale or wren, the human baby gives off the most extraordinarily earsplitting shrieks and cries. Extraordinary by comparison, certainly: Because whereas the cry of other babies provokes mirth or amusement, think back for a moment; whenever a human baby begins to cry, in some public place, at a meeting, or in a moviehouse or at a football game, aren't the reactions to that particular cry those of nearly universal annoyance, anger, disgust, and even hatred? This is only to say that unlike the cry of other babies, who attract attention by generating sympathy, the human child (up to a relatively late age) attracts attention because human beings want desperately

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and instantly to quiet his outcry. Thus we see that the mature human being is not only a murderer, the way you say, but that baby is a born blackmailer; and that from the perspective of all the other creatures in the ecology, even the most unspoiled human cry must seem sinister. Though sentimentalized in a billion bad songs and/or poems, you can't fool the composers of nursery-rhymes, which as experts have shown are full of violence, murder, mischief and crime! That baby's playroom should be decorated with decals of baby lambs, bears, porcupines, giraffes or other creatures from the peacable kingdom of the animals is as unjust as it is outrageous, not to mention inaccurate! Like Lady Macbeth crying to hide her crimes, we protest too much with our insistence on our innocence, with our vision of children as cherubs! If only as a corrective, what we should really begin to picture on the walls of baby's playroom are pictures of Adam and Eve tearing their hair out as they exit from Paradise; Lucifer falling out of the sky and roasting his balls in hell; ideally, Junior should be called Hitler.

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Alan Ziegler

TIES

I'm not sure what to say when the man comes to my door and says he's my brother. It is true that I do have a brother, but this man does not resemble him. The man is battered, blood not quite dry speckling his face. What to say to him? After all, I would not want to reject him and find out later that he really *is* my brother, that he was in a war or accident, that he had been marred beyond recognition and then recently reinjured. But if it is not my brother, it must be someone who no longer knows who he is, someone going from door to door, hoping to finally reach the right door, where his true brother waits anxiously. I do not want to impede him in this journey by taking him in as my own brother, thus keeping him from ever finding his real identity. And what if I take him in and some day my real brother shows up in need, what do I do then; there is only so much room in this small house. And what will my wife think of all this.

At this moment, my wife comes home, and instantly recognizes this man as her brother. So, he has been in the right place all along. Suddenly, the house seems even smaller than before, and I wonder if it can hold three. I fear there may not be enough room for me. I hope there is space at my brother's.

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The Locust Keeper

Graham Petrie

To them he was simply "the old man" and they had no other name for him: he was so ancient that they had forgotten what he had once been called and knew nothing of his origins; there was some debate even as to whether he truly belonged to the tribe. Yet when they took me out to meet him, they showed him to me with pride: he was theirs now and was something to exhibit to visitors; he cost virtually nothing to keep in food and shelter and could easily be carried with them once the waterhole dried up and they had to move on. Besides, he looked after their locusts.

He lay on the ground at the foot of a pole stuck into the sand, and the insects were kept in a closed wickerwork basket that dangled from the top of this by a leather thong. The old men never fed them or tended to them in any way that I could see; no one else seemed to either, and yet they continued to live. If you listened carefully, you could hear a faint scrabbling inside, as of bodies being painfully dragged around; occasionally a leg or wing would appear through a join in the

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basketwork and remain there for hours or days on end. Then it would disappear: either a passing child had pulled it off, or the creature had regained enough energy to extricate itself; I was never able to tell.

They brought the old man dried meat and water, but he preferred to eat sand. He would scoop it up in handfuls and smear it into his mouth, sometimes mixing it with the water they gave him, but more often chewing it dry, his cheeks moving in a painful and relentless rhythm for hours before he was able to swallow it. I expected that they would resent this, that the women at least would maintain a sense of civilized propriety, and object, but nothing was ever done to stop him. In fact, it became quite a spectacle: the word would go out that "the old man's eating sand again," and they would all drop what they were doing and rush to watch him. Days of the tribe's existence must have been lost in this manner, but no one seemed to think this was important, and I too became used to experiencing time in the rhythm they had established.

The old man came to life at night, when they carried him into the circle of the fire and urged him to tell his stories. Usually he would respond at once: his toothless mouth would fall open and he would begin to recite, in a cracked and high-pitched voice, tales of his wanderings in his youth and the deeds of love and valour that he had performed. No one, I discovered, could corroborate these, for in all the memories of his listeners there was no time when the old man had not been exactly as he was now, telling the same stories in the same words, with the same pauses and the same repetitions, arousing at the same places the same gasps of awe and wonder and the same laughter. I have the tapes in front of me now, miles and miles of them, all exactly alike, and I wonder why I ever allowed myself to be deluded that the performance might one night vary, by a lapse of memory or a change of wording that it would be essential for me to record.

At other times he had to be persuaded: the women would rush at him and offer him violence, clawing to within an inch or two of his dulled eyes, while he sat there immobile, neither

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withdrawing nor turning his head; the children dashed past and scattered sand in his eyes and he accepted this indignity too, with passivity. Then, when they had given up their attempts and had retreated sullenly to their positions round the fire, when one of them had perhaps struck up a song and his fellows had begun to clap time with their hands and to join in the muttered chorus, the old man would start up a chant of his own, in a feeble voice that only gradually imposed itself, causing first a faltering and then a swift cessation among his rivals. This, I came to understand, was part of the ritual too, and played itself out in the same fashion on each occasion; I came to expect it and look forward to it, and to recognize the signals for each of its stages to come into effect.

The song too boasted of the old man's achievements: it told of his experience in a sports contest at which he had outrun, outswum, outfought and outjumped all opponents. At first I thought he was referring to some bygone Olympic meeting, for words that sounded uneasily familiar recurred again and again and reminded me of countries against which he might have competed; I soon dismissed this as an idle speculation and decided that the song referred to a local contest, swelled out of all proportion by pride and hearsay. And when I tried to question him more closely about this, he merely stared at me uncomprehendingly from his blear and red-rimmed eyes.

As he sang, a drool of saliva would trickle from his open mouth and gather at the corner of a lip before making its way down the runnels of his chin. Once a fly, attracted by the unexpected moisture, hovered at the pool so formed, and then landed to sip the liquids. It drank greedily, dangerously, pausing every few seconds to glance uneasily around it. The men stared at the black intruder that squatted on the wrinkled skin, but no one made a gesture to chase it away, fearful that they might interrupt the old man's thoughts. The insect grew more confident: it decided to explore the landscape before it and set out tentatively across the folded contours of his skin. The old man paid no attention, even when the fly paused on the bridge of his nose to scrape its legs together and glance

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insolently at the spectators. Finally it set off again into the desert. The faint droning sound it made persisted in the air for several seconds and, as though reminded of something, the old man made a feeble dash at his lip with his hand. He repeated the movement impatiently, three or four times, while the men watched him in silence. At length he gave up, allowing his hand to fall back and rest in the sand at his side.

They had tried to abandon him once, I was told, after his locusts died. There had been silence from the basket for some days, none of the scrabbling noises of life they were used to, and, as the old man took no notice, they raised the lid one day and looked inside. The insects were dead, they had shrivelled and curled up, like discarded pieces of paper held too long and too close before a fire. Why did you let them die, old man? they asked him, without hostility, their voices flat and empty. The old man stared across the desert and said nothing; he had never acknowledged his responsibility to look after these creatures and it could be no concern of his what happened to them. He would say nothing and they soon grew tired of questioning him; they withdrew to a distance and consulted among themselves.

Soon after this the waterhole dried up and, instead of taking him with them when they moved on, they left him behind. There was no malice in this, I was assured: it was part of the normal cycle of life and in other circumstances they might have left others with him, old women and crippled or deranged children. He bore them no resentment and accepted their action without protest; none of them expected to see him again and yet, when they finally returned, he was still there, more feeble and motionless than ever, but certainly alive. I could never find out how long the interval had been: some reckoned it as months, some days, and others claimed it was merely a matter of hours, depending equally on their methods of calculating time and their desire to honor or belittle the old man's achievement.

So they procured some more locusts for him to look after and set them up inside the same basket on the same pole, and

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propped the old man up at its foot, and life continued as usual. It was at this stage that I came to know him, and I was struck by the total indifference with which he accepted his fate: he appeared to live only for the evenings and the chance to sing or tell his stories. I tried to find out something of his true history, his name and his origins, but it was all of no use: I listen to my tapes now and all I can hear is the faint whirr of the motor, the scratching caused by a speck of dust or sand; and beyond that an endless silence, broken only by the plod of a camel's foot across the desert, the sudden laugh or scream of a child, the occasional rattle or wheezing intake of breath that showed that the old man still lived. There are days of my life there on these tapes, days or months, I no longer remember which, and the old man would tell me nothing.

Once more the locusts died, this time in a panic-stricken flurry that sent their whole cage rocking and swaying and almost toppled it from the pole. When the men looked inside it was already over: they had shrivelled and fallen like dead leaves and lay in a pathetic pyramid on the floor. They poured the bodies out in a heap at the old man's feet and challenged him with their eyes to defend himself, and once more he would do nothing except stare vacantly toward the horizon. They controlled their rage with difficulty and one of them even stepped forward as though to strike him; he stood there with his arm raised, staring down at the bundle of rags at his feet, then he allowed his arm to sink slowly to his side and turned away.

They decided to let him starve to death, but this time they would all stay and watch him, for who knew by what feat of magic or cunning he might once more survive if they merely abandoned him? They formed a circle round the pole and sat there, day after day, eating and drinking when they needed to, occasionally chatting and joking, but most of the time in silence. I tried to protest of course, to defend and save the old man, but they simply stared at me with bleak and uncomprehending eyes and at last I gave up. In all that time the old man made no effort to feed himself, not even to scoop a handful of

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sand into his mouth; flies settled on him in a dark and swollen mass and he was oblivious to them.

In the evenings he continued to sing his songs, starting up at the customary hour in the cracked and monotonous tones I had heard so often before. The others nodded approval at this gesture; they set up a slow and rhythmic handclap to accompany him. The words told the usual story: he was a great man who had run, swum, fought, thrown, jumped, and loved better than any man before him. When he had finished, he sank his head onto his breast and remained there, hardly moving, until the following night.

He outlasted even their determination to see him die this time, for the waterhole dried up and the grass was gone and they had no grain left, and still the old man breathed and sang. So they abandoned him for a second, or a tenth, or maybe a fiftieth time, taking me with them despite my entreaties and protests. And as they no longer had any use for the locusts, they left the cage behind them too when they moved on, as a marker.

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Gerard Malanga

A Portfolio of Photographs of Writers Accompanied by Poems

This portfolio consists of an exercise in which the photographer sent his portraits to poet-friends of the subjects and asked them to pick one portrait and provide an appropriate salutation.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

The eyes of the great dead yet look through ours.
The monosyllables go off to grieve alone. Into
the necessary mansions. Into the beast capable of
laughter, and velvet. Shot through with silent
moments stands a man in touch with his own story.

—*Stephen Sandy*

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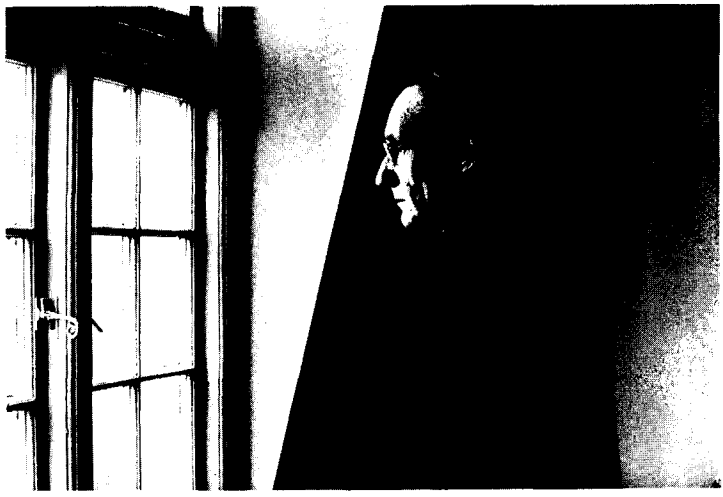

WILLIAM BURROUGHS

Face and figure of a cleric, he observes the window for a sign of the miraculous and should one appear his expression would indicate a certain reserve, if not skepticism, for to accept the probability of such an event would force him into schismatic difficulties. He has taught himself to accept his own finiteness, the impoverishment of the senses, of the body and of the mind with encroaching time. His beliefs are grounded in his person, and to witness the transcendant that he has not witnessed in his deepest and most prolonged meditations would indicate to him an aberration to which his wary stance already is alerted, towards himself. Nevertheless, he is prepared to observe and will reserve his absolute judgement until the very end of his wait, patiently positioned at the window.

—David Ignatow

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GALWAY KINNELL AND DAUGHTER MAUD

We stand beside our children
with our weight already distributed.
Here Maud's seen rocking
on her feet, on the balls
of her feet, as we say,
because a child's feet are
toys: she can go anywhere.

How is it then that our children
are anchors, who hold us to our lives
when we might otherwise follow
our arms to their fingertips
"already clutching at the emptiness?"

William Matthews

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OUR BUSINESS HERE BEING AYRE

Batman & Robin made some of us what we are today. Was Robin from Charles Henri Ford's home town of Narcissus, Mississippi? Sufferin' catfish—I hope so.

Pavel Tchelitchew used to write to Ford during their courting days: "my darling huckleberries finn. . ." Yep, it does seem that the Nation's blue-eyed-surrealist prides come from curious places. Jimmy Broughton, three years younger than Ford, from Modesto, California; Robert Duncan, nine years younger, from Bakersfield. And Philip Lamantia, much later, San Francisco, 1927. He was published in Ford's magazine *View* when he was but 15. . . I wonder what was in the water to cause three 'fancy' writers like Guy Davenport, Emmett Williams, and me to come from a triangle described by towns with the names Anderson, Greenville, and Asheville? Maybe not Aquarian water; maybe it was epiphytic?

A friend asked Tchelitchew: "What does Charles do to stay so young?" The painter gave the laconic reply: "Nothing. Like the Chinese, just nothing." Well, Narcissus didn't die of writer's cramp, but Charles Henri has been busier than most, whether in Pawlet, Vermont or Kathmandu. The reason you don't hear of him more is that he was not interested in being academic fodder and knowing all the professors from Kenyon to Harvard Square.

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He did better at the salons where formidable ladies like Florine Stettheimer, Edith Sitwell, Gertrude Stein, and Djuna Barnes presided. Barnes said Ford had eyes whose whites went to the sides of his head, like wild animals. That's nicer than being admired by Harold Bloom.

Charles Henri is said not to like this photograph by Gerard Malanga. I do like it. Though he may not appear quite sweet sixteen (his favorite year) at 62, he is still looking with that cloudless gaze of his through the jalousies (or whatever you call the awnings or blinds at his home in Crete) at the almond-eyed éphebes and kouroi of the imagination. Ford, in a recent interview in *Gay Sunshine*, says he is still "just a southern child, a long way from home." Neither have other fifteen-year-old bards disappeared. That cosmic authority, Dom Pierre-Silvester Houédard, OSB, of Prinknash Abbey, Gloucestershire, was reporting just the other day on two from Kent: one is called Geoffrey 'Moondusk' Moorehouse and the other is Wm Chapple. Like Art Blakey said of one of his groups of *Jazz Messengers*: "I always stay with the youngsters. When these get too old, I'll get me some younger ones. . . Keeps the mind active."

One night, when Batman & Robin have come to dinner, it will not surprise me to look up and see Charles Henri materializing out of some halation—"divinely inconspicuous as the Duchesse de Guermantes arriving while a private musicale is in progress," to quote his friend Parker Tyler, talking about something else.

—Jonathan Williams

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JOHN CAGE

[

. . .]

—Charles Wright

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BILL KNOTT

Somebody just handed me this photo of a stiff
I think I see smoke coming out of it

Why is everybody abusing this corpse?
He props himself up to take it
Back to the four walls of his skull
With his bored frown and deadly gaze

He should be marble by now
Kept around on lawns for all to recall
His great works and deeds while yet deceased

Caller of the perfect crimes
Death loves a shining mark

—*James Tate*

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Daniel Halpern

CLAMS

The gift of clams is here, waiting
in the large bowl on the cutting table.
We are waiting: the clams
softly opening and closing,
I in the kitchen, organizing
our hundred bottles of spice.
I take down oregano and sweet basil,
grate the cheese you forgot to cover,
and continue waiting.
The clams wait in their bowl.
They continue opening and closing—
closing when they think
I am looking at them. They are waiting
for the knife that will bare them to the world,
where they will taste the spices of the shelf,
giving up their grip on life.
I am waiting with this gift of clams.
In their opening and closing
they try to tell me something
of the hollow between their shells;
or is it not to pry
into things I won't in the end understand?—
this gentle conversation in released sea air,
this gift of clams.

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Stuart Friebert

SUBMARINE POEM

I

You think of moving the captured submarine
to a permanent berth alongside the museum
in your city. A retired engineer who spent
years on a plan to move the Eiffel Tower
volunteers a practical suggestion, so you
stop traffic on a lovely night in summer
and, as thousands watch, you inch the sub
across the outer drive. When it's in place
you introduce a famous naval commander
whose dedication address is piped ashore.

II

At first, the interior of the sub
will seem unbelievably complicated,
a maze of dials, valves and gauges,
every available foot of space occupied,
but listen to your guide: though you
will lose a good deal of what she says
and she talks too much of how cramped
the quarters are, running her hand over
the checkered blue linen on the bunks,
and seems to idolize the enemy captain—
carefully she points to a picture of him
sitting on a horse on a farm in Bavaria—
she will quit her job just before the tour
is over and press past you. Miss, stop! Stop,
Miss! everyone cries and is plunged in grief.

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III

The movies you see later in the theater
are official navy films, taken during
the actual battle when your forces were
overcoming the raider. You press both
hands on the slatted wooden seat and
stare at the waves, they go right up,
blank everything out, and your mind
moves to the folding top on the washstand
which becomes the captain's desk when
he lowers it and draws the blue curtain.

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Richard Stull

AT A CERTAIN TIME OF LIFE

There are hundreds of secret things
You should reveal; because when you
Repress one thing, it sets off
A chain reaction that will eventually
smother you. This is what
My psychology book says. Very clearly,
It states you should not be ashamed
Of any abnormalities of character.
Everyone has them: like inserting
A tampax up your nose, or saying
One thing and feeling another.
The only way for you to attain full
And complete adulthood with dignity
Is to live out your nature,
No matter how disgusting or childish.
Then if no one likes you, well,
At least you will know why and can say
Without embarrassment, "I tried!"
They say this course will ease
Your conscience, but I have found no
Promise of popularity in my reading.

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Paul Hall

MEMORY AIDS

things are easily forgotten.
yesterday, i was surprised to find
an ash burning its way
to my lips. the only thing separating
the ash from my lips
was an ever-shortening and extremely thin
cylinder of paper.
apparently stuffed with fiber
of some sort. *a cigarette*
you are saying to yourself, and
of course, you are right.
but what was it doing there?
i don't smoke. i never have.
i went about my business,
like an astronomer, occasionally
observing the orange coal like
the approach of a comet
and watching for other things, too
like the buzz of the doorbell
to come roaring by like a meteor
or a breakfast odor to come beaming
over the bleak horizon of drunkenness

inevitably, the ash burned my lips.
obviously, the cigarette had been
inserted between my lips for several
very good reasons:

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1) to remind me that i don't smoke
2) to demonstrate *what* i don't smoke
   and *how* i don't smoke it
3) to remind me to take the cigarette
   out of my mouth.
and as a bonus, this time,
i was reminded to put cigarettes
down on my shopping list
which reminds me to go shopping
which reminds me to buy food
which reminds me to eat
which reminds my body
to keep living.

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Neruda vs. Sartre at the Sea

Helen Barolini

They tell of certain years in the Italian literary-prize business as the French would speak of a good or bad vintage year: the giddy splendors of 1965 prize-fêting and fighting, the multiple crises of '68 culminating in the sad death of Nobel poet Salvatore Quasimodo while presiding at some minor poetry prize event at Amalfi, and the year Moravia, out of pique or paradox, went out to found his own prize, giving the first award to his ex-wife in lieu (it's said) of support payments.

Italian literati have more prizes for each other than there are grapes in all of the Loire. And enough gossip about them during the lulls to provide endless *storielle*—always dearer to competing writers than tales of switches among lovers or spouses or sexes.

There was a week during that summer some years ago, just following the brief Israel-Arab War, when Viareggio was, for a moment, raised from provincial to almost global splendor. It would make a great Fellini movie. It was 1967, the year of Big Names at the seaside.

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The stretch of Tuscany bordering on the Tyrrhenian Sea would be the setting, and, specifically, the resort of Viareggio, a once-uninhabited sand beach backed by thick strands of umbrella pines where Percy Shelley's drowned body was washed up. Viareggio is now a flat ugly vacationville where an ugly bronze head of the poet has been stuck on a shaft opposite the post-office to remember poor Shelley. The famous pines are brown, dry sticks dying—dead—of fumes and the depredations of those hordes who now throng the sea and churn it from blue to brown; the beach is paved over, squalid with shops, jammed with miles and miles of beach apparatus and bodies. The sea is a sewer of floating fruit skins, plastic bags, eggshells, urine. It has all the melancholy of Fellini's resort town for *I Vitelloni*.

Now imagine a turn-of-the-century hotel once called Grand, now called Royal, but presently neither. It is the scene each summer for the past forty-four years (excluding only two occupation years of World War II) of the literary prize which is Italy's oldest, best, richest, most prestigious, most leftist, out of a national total of 338 such awards.

Here gather the characters who make up the prize contingent. Outside the hotel a kind of gray smoke-screen (which everyone refers to as this *foschia terribile*) lays over each day almost as if such density of literati at Viareggio had raised its own pall of smog; as if these lethal fumes were trying to render the frenetic semblance of local life as dead and brown as the pine-woods.

Inside, talk, the literary form of action, takes place in the lobby in over-stuffed armchairs placed around tables loaded with brochures . . . . "The Versilian Riviera offers you sunshine, gentle warm seas, golden sands, the shade of delightful pine trees . . . . Don't forget to go, because you won't forget you came." Talk continues on the dining terrace under a charming green arbor (perhaps plastic) that, withal, still can't dispel the sense of dread melancholy which the ineluctable backdrop of dead pines bestows. Waiters, head-waiters, a sommelier, prosciutto with figs and eggs in aspic are all there.

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Despite the haughty stance of the dining room staff, the complicated ceremony of serving runs down constantly with a surfeit of waiters producing overcooked pasta, withered salad, the wrong orders or no orders at all.

The bulk of the guests at the Grand-Royal are the twenty-two jurists of the Viareggio Literary prize who are there with their families (all expenses paid) to distribute twenty-eight million lire in prizes to the various writers, poets, scholars, who will be off-scene until Award Night.

Principal among the assembled characters is Leonida Répaci (already an old Fellini hand: he played himself, the gabby intellectual, in *La Dolce Vita*), President-Founder of the Viareggio Prize and still indefatigable after scores of summers of it and equally as many novels, but slightly more hallucinatory each succeeding year. Répaci has white hair, wild blue eyes, and is a combination of Charles Ruggles, the White Rabbit, and Mr. Dick in *David Copperfield*. He is constantly running around in shorts and sandals, clapping his hands to round up dawdling jurists, herding them to conferences, harranguing them to be on time. He is followed by a prim duenna-wife who wears dark glasses and hair rollers under a scarf, and a large-bosomed jovial secretary.

Among the distinguished cast there'll be Goffredo Parise who has just won a Viareggio for his book *Il Padrone* (*The Boss*) and has now been raised from the contention to jurist. He is just back from Viet Nam and likes to assume a boy-ruffian pose. He is credited with much expertise in the matter of vote-swapping, promissory actions, plotting, etc. They say he won the five-million lire Viareggio prize the year before by having his claque withdraw their support from the one-million lire Strega Prize to risk everything on the larger haul. His passing onto the jury, signals, perhaps, that his years of *enfant terrible* are at an end—he's approaching forty. He now aspires to a certain casual, sporty elegance and is concerned about his paunch. He asks sartorial advice of Countess Piovene who points out that his trousers trail unfashionably over his sandals. During the whole convocation he will maintain a mysterious

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Chinese air (he's also back from China) and indulge in much whispering and tête-à-têting to advance his protégés. He's successful at everything, including dancing the shake with Signora Buzzati, wife of fellow jurist and famous writer Dino Buzzati.

Giuseppe Ungaretti, old and beloved poet, who is announced on the roster of names as a jurist, will, however, be conspicuous by his absence as he's gone off to London to read poetry with Allen Ginsburg, Pablo Neruda, Ted Hughes, et al.

Guido and Mimi Piovene are there. He, the jurist, is pale and quiet. He goes to the beach under a large sombrero and is subject to a nervous tic of lip-twisting. A Veneto aristocrat with leftist sympathies, he is known as the Red Count and lives, he has declared, only to write. His wife Mimi is an affable, elegant blonde with a static hair-do and a luxury wardrobe of clothes which she constantly changes. She is known as The Firmament for the great sparkle of her jewels, or as The Madonna di Loreto for the quantity of them. She drives a blue Skylark and speaks French on the beach.

Maria Luisa Astaldi is a jurist, editor, scholar, TV consultant, Socialist, and a formidable literary lady who admires Mrs. Gaskell and detests American air-conditioning to the point of foregoing some important cultural confab in New York because of it. She is always attired in expensive pants-outfits with kooky stockings showing above glittering ball slippers. She will refuse to go to the reception organized by Répaci's secretary and offered by a rich Milanese manufacturer who vacations nearby because ladies don't attend the affairs of garment-makers. She smiles a Cheshire Cat smile and has a chauffeur who drives her around the countryside for lunch or museum-viewing. Her husband can't bear Viareggio; he's cruising off Elba in their yacht waiting for her. Despite her admiration for the Anglo-American world, she needles TV personality Ruggiero Orlando about his not using a fish knife, attributing this to his too-long residence in the United States. Someone replies that the Duke of Bedford also dismisses the

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fish knife as a contemptible upstart used only in bourgeois (and socialist?) households since it was not introduced until Queen Victoria's reign and anyone who is anyone will have table silver that is Georgian or earlier. Of such preciousness is the tabletalk at Viareggio composed.

Giorgio Caproni, a gaunt, graying poet and jurist with an old-fashioned crew cut, says *he* won't go to the USA because all the food there is canned. This reinforces his old-fashioned air and is amusing to hear at a pretentious Italian hotel where canned peas, canned fruit cup, and frozen fish are served. It marks him as a true poet. The other Italian intellectuals will have more austere reasons for hating America—Viet Nam, affluence, influence, convenience, insipience, resilience, air-conditioning, etc. Caproni, like many poets living on modest teachers' salaries, supplements it by vacationing on the literary prize circuit: besides expenses, jurists receive honorariums.

Milena Milani, an ex-bella, is a dark, squarish-faced authoress whose sun-burn gives her an American Indian look. She is a perpetual attendant at these literary occasions along with Maria Luisa Spazzani, detto L'Armoire, a great big figure of a poetess who also looms ever-present at literary do's. Both ladies have already had their haul of prizes and Milena now has the added distinction of a novel being banned.

Libero Bigiaretti, another writer and head of the Italian Writers' Union, is an ex-Viareggio jurist and a mere onlooker this year. He assumes an anti-literary pose as he does at every book launching, publisher's cocktail party, prize ceremony, book promotion deal, etc., at which he always turns up. He affects to look off into distances and from time to time mutters, "Is it possible these people can't see the irony of all this?"

Other jurists are scholars and University professors. They are serious, erudite, dignified men who walk about with multilingual newspapers and books, and try to be in bed by 11:30. They are Communist or tending that way, or have been that way and are now out. There is a fine scene where they're pulled onto the dance-floor at the night-club where Répaci's secretary has organized an evening for them with free champagne (free,

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but an inferior Italian brand, they will complain later) by leggy, bikini-clad black Brazilian chorus-girls.

The wives of the austere professors will outdo themselves in an outdated show of conspicuous consumption. One is said to have spent half a million lire on her Viareggio outfits; another has a navy blue chauffeur-driven limousine; another goes off daily to buy fabulous antiques in Lucca. In looks and tastes and habits they are indistinguishable from the wives of American capitalists except that they—the Commies—live better. The paradox doesn't present itself and no one is rude enough to mention it, except in the whisperings of a few Catholic malcontents who would like to go all the way left and live in such style but don't dare.

Fellini's script should bring out the factions, counterfactions, and factious factions at this literary bazaar. The effects of the 6-day Israel-Arab conflict are still in the air and have a bearing on the confabulations. The hard-core Communists stand with Nasser and the Arabs, while those who are Communist and Jewish are caught on the horns of the dilemma. The ex-fascists are now the moralizing section of the jury; the Catholics will be constantly looking for a chance at "dialogue"; and the old-time anti-clericals will gleefully relate that the present Pope is really Eichmann (witness that same featureless functionary face and drab manner), and that the real Paul VI was kidnapped and hung in Eichmann's place. This explains the Vatican's pro-Arab line.

Walk-on parts will abound in this film: recognizable aspiring lady intellectuals, the hosts and hostesses of the literati, and just plain hangers-on in the service of authors in the running at Viareggio who will keep their authors informed of which way the wind blows by listening in to lobby talk. This is essential so that authors who know they can't make it can send a wire to the jury and "withdraw" their books at the last minute, thus saving face. This ploy will be used by a noted lady writer whose first one, having her husband take a leave of absence from the Viareggio jury for this summer so that her book could be in the lists, was construed by the jurists as

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having all the delicacy of a Mafia tip-off.

There will be appearances every now and then by husky, tatooed, blue-eyed and bronzed Americans in soiled tee-shirts and denims who pass through the lobby on their way to the bar looking curiously at the literary types; the Americans are hale, hearty, loud, and are at Viareggio for an international speed-boat race to Corsica and back. They'll stay totally ignorant of the literary prize business and assume that the hotel is filled with people to see the start-off of their race.

There are hotel lobby type people, too, including two old Dukes of the House of Savoy, cousins of the late Vittorio Emmanuele II, who turn up every summer without fail at the Grand-Royal and assist impassively with their Buster Keaton faces at the Award Night ceremony. Daily they pass through the lobby on their way to the beach across the street in deep red and deep blue terry cloth bathrobes from which their spindly legs make startling white exclamation points.

During the Award Night scene we'll see an en masse arrival of a Queens College professor, his wife and daughters, and the group of seventeen students they've brought abroad for a summer of Italian culture and life at Viareggio. The professor has wangled a whole block of seats for Award Night from Répaci by deeply touching the old organizer at the thought that for these Americans *his* Viareggio Prize will be the chief cultural event of their summer—perhaps of their lives.

From time to time we will see the enormous table on the dining terrace which accomodates the twenty-two jurists and several secretaries. There will be lively discussions for each category of award with groups pushing their candidates against those of other groups, maneuverings, concessions, pledges, conclusions; but the liveliest discussion will be for the International Prize which is the year's innovation (in the hope of keeping dwindling attention focussed on the Viareggio Prize which, though first, best, wisest, etc., is yearly losing ground to the upstart imitative prizes). With the grand gesture of five million lire to an International star who "has spent his very life for culture, understanding amongst peoples, and

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peace,'' Répaci aims to keep Viareggio in the forefront and add new lustre to a flagging institution.

A lot of big names are tossed around the big table: Jean-Paul Sartre, Pablo Neruda, Peter Weiss, Lewis Mumford, Bertrand Russell, Robert Lowell. One jurist proposes Rafael Alberti, the Spanish anti-Franco poet who has been living in exile in Italy the past thirty years—an excellent poet, an honest man, and someone who could use the money. The proposal will fall effortlessly and it is clear that the battle will be between Sartre and Neruda. The film dialogue can be improved but must follow certain lines: the hard-core Communists, the practical-minded, and the disoriented will back Neruda; mixed-sentimentalists, idealists, and the remaining disoriented will back Sartre.

There's a heated skirmish as to whether Sartre, who declined a Nobel, will bother with Viareggio. Someone will say that Sartre only refused the Nobel because it wasn't given to him the year he wanted it. (Hoots of derision and catcalls will follow this). Some will say that Sartre is the only name of enough stature to dignify the prize and establish it securely for the future. The practical will rejoin that the prize—and they, the jurists—will be a laughing stock if, as is certain, Sartre doesn't show up.

An organized lady jurist points out that Neruda has been making the international scene lately and is a professional by now at going around to poetry readings and collecting prizes; he'll turn up at Viareggio for sure. Someone notes that Neruda is in London; another notes that he can easily be here by Saturday—look how easy it is for Jackie Onassis to get a plane and come down to Marli for dinner, just a few miles away.

There will be shouting, vituperations, then Répaci will hammer for silence and call for a vote between Sartre and Neruda. The decision for Neruda will bring the vigorous architect Bruno Zevi, leader of the Sartrian faction, to his feet to call out forthrightly, ''I consider any vote against Sartre as a vote against Israel!''

Confusion and babel; jurists rise to their feet and protest.

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Shouting, indignation, a free-for-all. An excellent movie scene. It is the highpoint of the film, almost as good as last year's scene when Moravia engaged Répaci in fisticuffs.

In conclusion the Sartrians will append a paragraph to the International Award proclamation in which they list themselves by name as having voted for Sartre. The Catholics will mutter that these things are always leftist and the big money always goes to the Communists. But all passions will be spent that evening at the midnight beach supper organized by Répaci's indefatigable secretary who got a local restaurateur to put on a midnight supper at the beach with such specialties as *frutta del mare*, cabbage and bean soup, codfish with cornmeal, and lollipops for desert. Countess Piovene will dress grandly for the event and rescue a rather miserable affair by pronouncing the dishes "regional" and thus endowing them with an aura of folklore. In any case, a free festa is a great pacifier.

Pablo Neruda, a big stentorian-voiced man, does arrive the following evening and reads his poems in a ringing, revivalist voice before collecting his check and departing. No word from Sartre. Festivities dissolve after a Boost-Viareggio group puts on a playlet by a local hippie about the coming revolution which the audience will watch ungraciously, making unkind remarks, yawning, talking, moving about. Only the royal dukes, impassive and correct as always, will watch the performing beatniks with good manners and applause. All this to the background din of the American boatmen in the bar who still haven't figured out what's been going on.

The last scene will be a mélee as jurists and prize winners accost the buffet table under the shepherding of Répaci and his wife, now rollerless and couched in a many-colored, batwing-sleeved organza fantasy. The rest of the audience drifts out into the noisy smoggy Viareggio night.

But that's not the real end. The living end will come with the arrival of next year's prize-designate Italo Calvino's telegram: "Believing the era of literary prizes definitely over and done with, I wish to decline the Viareggio award. I cannot

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endorse with my acceptance an institution now empty of all significance."

The old order is breaking up all over. In the summer of '67, Women's Lib is looming up over the horizon; the sit-ins of winter '67-'68 when the students of Rome University chanted *"Mao, si, Moravia no!"* are imminent; soon the moon itself will be no longer inviolate; and somebody called Mario Puzo will break records in Italy with a book called *The Godfather* to the indignation of *real* Italian writers.

Prizes won't ever again be as factious, fashionable, or funny. And there will be regrets. As Bigiaretti observed: "These prize ceremonies take the place of Renaissance courts with their patrons and protégés and curriers of favor and poets in search of laurel." And the pleasantry at Viareggio in the summer of '67 was that the poets of today are not so interested in laurel as in gathering together enough rosemary and other green stuff to garnish the roasts for the rest of their days.

But after many a summer dies even that swan.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Asher/Straus (*Between Two Walls*) is a collaboration of Sheila Asher and Dennis Straus, recent recipients of the *Panache* Experimental Fiction Prize.

Thomas M. Disch (*The Joycelin Shrager Story*) is a poet, writer and editor. In March, Knopf will publish a collection of his stories, *Getting Into Death*.

Vicki Lindner (*Conversation*) has been published in *The Bard Review, Fiction* and *Viva*.

Graham Petrie (*The Locust Keeper*) teaches English and Film at McMaster College in Hamilton, Ontario. He has published a book on Truffaut, and fiction in *Playboy, Encounter* and elsewhere.

Diane Vreuls (*On the Feast of Malcolm*) lives in Oberlin, Ohio. Her novel, *Are We There Yet?*, will be published in the spring of 1976.

INTERVIEWS

Michael Barber (Kingsley Amis Interview) is a freelance journalist and broadcaster. He lives near London, and is a regular contributor to the *BBC World* and *Books and Bookmen*.

Gerald Clarke (P.G. Wodehouse Interview) is on the staff of *Time* and has also written for *Esquire, The New Republic, The Atlantic* and *Rolling Stone*.

POETRY

Michael Benedikt's books include *The Body, Sky, Mole Notes* and the forthcoming *Night Cries*.

George Bogin has been published in *APR, The Beloit poetry Journal, The Massachusetts Review* and elsewhere.

Kate Ellen Braverman graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in 1971. Her poems have appeared in *Ironwood* and *Momentum*.

Florence Cassen is a writer, painter and graphic designer. Her poems have appeared in *Epoch*.

Douglas Crase has been published in *Poetry, Partisan Review* and *ZZZ*; his political commentary has appeared in *The Nation*.

Stuart Freibert directs the writing program at Oberlin College, where he co-edits *Field*. His latest book is *Up In Bed*.

Gene Frumkin directs the creative writing program at the University of New Mexico. His most recent books are *Dostoevsky & Other Nature Poems* and *Locust Cry: Poems 1958-65*.

Paul Hall is a graduate student in English at Wayne State University.

Daniel Halpern is the editor of *Antaeus* and The Ecco Press, and the author of two books of poems, *Traveling on Credit*, and *Street Fire*.

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Jonathan Holden directs the creative writing program of Stephens college. He was recently an NEA Fellowship recipient.

Jane Kenyon has published poems in *APR, Ohio Review,* and *Michigan Quarterly Review.* She won the Hopwood Award for Poetry at the University of Michigan.

Walter Knupfer is at work on translations from Polish, Czech and Russian.

Adam Lefevr 's play, *Phil Gafney*, will be produced in the spring, 1976, at the University of Iowa.

Judith Mandelbaum was a co-founder of Kite Books, a community publishing program in Boston. She currently lives in Paris.

McCann has previously been published in *Bachy* and is active in the Venice, California poetry workshop.

Idris Baker McElveen recently received her Ph.D. in English from the University of South Carolina.

Kristina McGrath graduated from Columbia University and is active in Poetry-In-The-Schools program in N.Y.C.

M.Z. Ribalow is a playwright and directs and develops plays for Joseph Papp. He has contributed poetry, articles and reviews to numerous periodicals.

S.J. Sackett has published critical studies, translations and a children's book. He teaches at Fort Hays Kansas Sate College.

Barry Schechter's first book, *Rimbaud in Boy's Town*, is forthcoming.

Virginia R. Terris's collection of poems will be published in the fall, 1976. Her poems have appeared in *Chelsea, APR, Poetry Now*, and elsewhere.

Mark Vinz teaches at Moorhead State University in Minnesota and is editor of *Dacotah Territory*. His books are *Winter Promises*, and *Letters to the Poetry Editor.*

Suzanne Ostro Zavrian is co-editor and co-publisher of *Extensions*. Her book, *Demolition Zone*, was recently published.

Alan Zieg er is co-editor of *Some* and his work has appeared in *APR, Unmuzzled Ox* and elsewhere. His chapbook is *Planning Ahead.*

PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTFOLIO AND ACCOMPANYING POEMS

Malanga's photographs of poets and writers have been exhibited and published extensively. His most recent book of poems is *Rosebud.*

David Ignatow's most recent books are *The Notebooks, Selected Poems* and *Facing the Tree.*

William Matthews teaches at the University of Colorado. His books are *Ruining the New Road, Sleek for the Long Flight* and *Sticks and Stones.*

Stephen Sandy's two books are *Stresses in the Peaceable Kingdom* and *Roofs*. He is an Associate Professor at Bennington.

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James Tate is the author of four books of poems, most recently *Absences* and *Hottentot Ossuary*. A previous Contributor's Note in these pages stating that he was in the process of moving to Colorado is erroneous. He teaches at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Jonathan Williams is a poet, publisher, essayist and hiker and "the heartbeat of The Jargon Society."

Charles Wright has published three books of poems, the most recent being *Bloodlines*. He was recently awarded a Guggenheim fellowship.

ART

Mark di Suvero was born in Shanghai in 1933. In 1975 he erected fifteen sculptures around New York City as an extension of his one man show at the Whitney Museum, the largest exhibition ever organized for an American sculptor.

Vali Myers lives in Positano, Italy. Her work has been exhibited in Amsterdam, New York and elsewhere. A documentary film about her by Ed van der Elsken will be shown on WNET in New York in the near future.

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